

STORM
AGAINST THE
WIND

HELEN HULL JACOBS

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STORM AGAINST THE WIND

Books by

HELEN HULL JACOBS

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BARRY CORT

TENNIS

“BY YOUR LEAVE, SIR”

The Story of a Wave

Lieutenant (J.G.) HELEN HULL JACOBS
U.S.N.R.

STORM AGAINST THE WIND

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New York • 1944

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TO. S.D.E.

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Helen Hull Jacobs
Lieutenant (jg) U.S.N.R.

U. S. Naval Training School (WR), New York
November, 1943.

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PART I

THE GREAT FRESH

SUDDENLY the sun came out through a rift in the slate-colored clouds, cutting a wide, bright swath across the mountains and valleys of the upper James River. Color released from the constant pall sprang forth hopefully; the rich, strong green of pine and cedar, magenta splotches of the Judas-tree and dogwood—a tentative pink and white protest against the hard spring.

It was May, 1771, and the land was ready to expand, to breathe again. But the flooding warmth and light of the sun came briefly. Turbulent winds blew down the slopes and the rain began once more, steady and insistent. Thus it had been for eighteen days, river and stream straining at their banks, bursting the earthen bonds. Above the swish of wind-driven rain, the thundering rush of water and the crack of falling trees rose wild and ominous.

Beyond the mountains toward the rolling Virginia Tidewater, the sky was serene and clear; sunlight, shimmering on the swelling waves giving to their brutal force an incongruous brightness. Swept up by the flood, battered by matted logs and animal carcasses, farm-houses, plantation slave quarters and outbuildings sagged drunkenly, then collapsed. For desolate miles the rich soil lay buried beneath rock-studded sand. From Augusta and Albemarle to Tidewater, shattered warehouses disgorged their hogsheads of golden leaf. Like gigantic corks, they rolled and bobbed in the boiling torrent.

Warning of the flood came downriver to Richmond as fast as flying hooves could carry it. In the Old City Tavern, a wagoner from Albemarle spread word of the devastation in a sonorous voice that carried to every ear. For a moment there was ringing silence, then the room began emptying. With noisy cries and scuffling feet, men went to seek out their homes and their land, to stand with them against the flood waters. The wagoner watched them with tight lips until a hand, laid roughly on his arm, spun him round.

"Did you pass Shipley? Tell me, man, in the name of heaven—is it safe?"

The wagoner looked up into the green eyes of a young man well over six feet tall, taking in with a glance his immaculately clubbed reddish-blond hair, and the fawn-colored coat fitted snugly to broad shoulders.

"An Shipley be y ours, sir?" he queried.

"My father's—Nicholas Hilliard's—tell me!"

The wagoner shook his head gloomily. "Hilliard the planter—"

"Yes, yes, tell me!"

"I've just come by Shipley. 'Tis struck by the fresh and your wharf is gone."

The young man's companion, thirty-odd years of age, shorter and slighter, and dressed more soberly than a country parson, took up the questioning. "Is that as far as the river has risen? The quarters are safe?"

"'Tis all I could see from where I rode. But they say the river is rising sixteen inches every mortal hour. 'Twould strike you dumb iffen you saw the cattle and horses piled twelve feet high on the banks and good leaf spewed on the water." As he spoke, his long grave face and leather shirt were nearly of a color, both coated with the dust of the road, but his dark eyes were afire with excitement.

The two men did not wait to hear more. They rushed from the tavern, untethered their horses, mounted and galloped off toward Westham. There they saw that the warehouses were down, their battered timbers borne like driftwood on the current, and that the logs, driving downriver to the height of a sloop's bowsprit, had torn it from its moorings.

"Steady, Nero!" The younger man, Sheldon Hilliard, brought his horse to a trot. "What a homecoming for my father, Colonel Braxton." He spoke in a tight voice.

Braxton nodded. "It's enough to break his heart, after the long journey from England, when he hoped to see his land green with crops."

His land meant more to Nicholas Hilliard than merely acres of fenced fields and crops. It was, as he so often expressed it, a part of himself, symbolic of the only life he considered worth living. He had hoped to find this same love of the land in his son, had

gratefully nurtured the first signs of it and seen it develop to an intensity that approached his own. It had bound him in close companionship with Sheldon, even before Deborah Hilliard's death left them alone at Shipley, dependent upon each other to help bring out of what seemed for so long, a meaningless future, some semblance of happiness and order.

"I shouldn't have cut the time so fine. If I had left Chericoke when Mr. Cary brought my father's letter from Philadelphia—" Sheldon spoke almost as if to himself.

Braxton shook his head. "You had a bad fall. It would have been unwise to travel any sooner."

"I should have risked it. It was my own fault, jumping Domino into a patch of rabbit holes." In an angry tide of self-reproach, he urged Nero to a gallop, clamping hard-muscled thighs against the saddle.

They were silent until they reached the Three Forked Road, where Shipley's road branched off. Through budding elms they could see the broad expanse of brick that was Shipley greathouse. With a sudden sense of relief, they checked their pace. Both men and horses breathed heavily, the air like a stifling weight on the lungs.

Nero trembled and pricked up his ears, his head infallibly turned toward human sound, the rapid patter of feet. Both men's eyes followed the sound, and narrowed furiously when a band of negroes broke from the woods, crossed the fork and plunged into the cover beyond.

"Algy, Macon!" Sheldon yelled at two of the retreating backs, but they flew on unheeding. His father's slaves running away like frightened animals when every hand was needed. He cursed after them and spurred Nero angrily down the Shipley road. Braxton galloped beside him, silent, afraid to express his own fears.

They were fifty yards from the house when they saw Abel, the Hilliards' oldest house servant, running lamely toward them. Gray-haired, crippled with rheumatism, he lumbered forward waving his arms. His eyes were round and white as a winter moon when he finally stopped, gasping for breath, unable to say what had brought him to meet them.

Sheldon spoke for him, impatiently. "Has my father come?"

Abel jerked his head and pointed toward the river.

"At the river? At the quarters? Speak up, Abel, where is he?"

"At—de quarters—Mars Sheldon." The negro gasped. "Mars Nick—he won't listen to nobody," he finished almost in one breath.

"Have all the house servants gone?"

"All but me an' Sennie."

"Damned swine!" Sheldon cursed, and set off across the tree-lined drive toward the wharf road. He knew that Braxton would follow him; that it was useless to protest. After all, the Colonel was his father's closest friend. He moved on, squinting against the bright yellow glare of the water. What he saw at closer range made him draw in his breath sharply and raise himself on his stirrups-irons. Half way up to the house, the terrace was under water, and to right and left fields and woods were a heaving, debris-littered lake. Caught among the half-submerged trees at the edge of the fields were grotesque heaps of cabin logs, cattle and corn, and pinned in the wreckage, the bodies of at least a dozen negroes and two white men. Borne down by the flood, swept from their own land, they must have been trapped and crushed by the logs. A bitter taste rose in his mouth and he felt as if he were going to be sick.

He turned to Braxton and was struck by the tense pallor of his face.

"There are hands on the quarter hill, Sheldon. Many of them. Maybe those are not your slaves down there," Braxton observed with as little hope as he knew Sheldon felt.

The slave quarters in the clearing lay on rising ground. A hundred yards from the river they spread toward the crown of the wooded hillock. Sheldon and Braxton galloped on, past the stables, the granary, the dairy. The buildings were deserted. Pressing on through turned earth, they picked their way to the water's edge and followed it to the quarters. Then they saw how violently the flood had done its work. All but the uppermost cabins had been swept down the rise, battered and broken against the wreckage below. To the peak of one of the cabin roofs two slaves clung, motionless with utter exhaustion. Then, as if his benumbed senses were just aroused, Sheldon heard the agonized cries of voices he knew, and further up the hill a frightened babble. His strong-boned face set in pale rage. They were worse than animals; standing there,

doing nothing, letting those men die. Abel was wrong. His father couldn't be here. Suddenly, an even greater fear struck him. His eyes swept the river in desperate scrutiny, and seeing no sign of a boat, closed for a moment in relief.

When the figures on the hill were still an ebony blur, he began calling his father. Fear struggled with reason when no answer came, and the slaves, drawing together, watched him approach with frightened eyes. He dropped from his horse and strode toward them, heedless of Braxton, who rode up close behind him and dismounted at his side.

"He might be tending wounded in one of the cabins." Braxton tried to keep his own fear out of his voice. But Sheldon could not hear him for the slaves' sudden babbling, so he ran alone up the hill to look.

The slaves drew back from Sheldon, circling around him as he approached. Whining pickaninnies clung to their mothers' skirts, and here and there in the group he heard a broken sob. "Where is your master?" he cried, searching face after face. The sobs grew louder, but none answered his question. "Where is he!" He whipped them with his words and found response at last.

Lacey, one of the stable-hands, spoke. "Mars Nick, he done took de flatboat and rowed out afta dem poah dahkies on de roof yonda. Shadrach went in de boat, too."

Sheldon flung round, panic written in his eyes. "Where? I don't see him!" He seized Lacey's arm and yanked him forward. "He's not out there, you confounded scoundrel! Where is he?"

The voice of Shadrach's wife rose above the wailing that had commenced in earnest. "He's der, Mars Sheldon. De udder side ob de cabin. De current done carried him round."

Sheldon's eyes swept the precarious pile. A sudden eddy would tear it apart. "Get me a boat here fast as you can!"

Braxton came back from the cabins, no longer trying to hide his anxiety. "He's not there, Sheldon."

"I know. He's on the river."

Braxton's face went ashen.

"I've sent for a boat. I'm going out to help him."

"You can't. You're not yet strong enough," Braxton told him quietly, reasonably. "You're but one day out of bed, Sheldon. I'll

take one of the hands and go."

"I'm all right. I'm going." Braxton knew from the steely intensity of the gray-green eyes that it was useless to argue. He would go in the boat with Sheldon and at least take the physical burden of rowing against the current to the wreckage.

Sheldon could not watch the cabin roof while he waited for the boat. He wheeled on the remaining slave women. "Fix up a place in those cabins to bring them to." He jerked his head toward the river, then swept the frightened black faces in one swift glance. "Are you all that's left here?"

"De udders done took an' run away."

"I saw them," he cried. "Ungrateful, cowardly swine." He spun round and yelled across the clearing, "Where's that boat?" This delay was driving him mad. If they didn't bring it in another minute he'd swim out to his father; he'd find the strength somehow.

A cry from Braxton at the water's edge sent his heart into his mouth. Eyes magnetically riveted on the wreckage, he ran down the hill, knowing that his driving fear had been of this. A sudden convulsive heave of water as it broke from the weakening barrier of boughs jammed the roof against the tangled cabin logs. It seemed to tremble at the apex of the pile before it fell apart. His horrified eyes stared at the spot where the roof had broken and the churning water had closed over the bodies of the slaves. After a timeless time the black heads reappeared; arms thrashing out, grasping for something solid.

A chill raced the length of his body. He stripped off his coat and boots, tearing himself from Braxton's restraining grasp.

"You can't do it, Sheldon! You'll be drowned. The current was even too strong for your father to row against. In the name of Heaven—"

"I'll swim it easier." Calmness settled suddenly over Sheldon with the enveloping chill of the water as he plunged in. The cries of alarm from the hill, the sound of the dragging feet of the men bearing the boat were lost upon him. His strength and his nerves gave themselves to the regular strokes of his arms and the beating of his legs. He cut far to the right, making allowance for the current, but he could feel it drawing him inexorably downstream. Thank God his father's boat was on the lee side of the wreckage.

It must be safe—safer than he, he thought, forcing breath into his aching lungs with painful effort. He lifted his head to get his bearings. The wreckage seemed to be drifting away from him, and he was swimming with all the strength he had. The water was chilling him to the marrow. If his arms and legs got numb—

Strong hands lifted him from the water, and he felt the boat's edge scraping his legs. He scrambled weakly, unseeing for a moment, to a sitting position on the bottom. Breath was coming back to him now, deeply, blessedly. The squeak of the oarlocks grated on his ears.

"Your foolishness has cost us precious time," Braxton said angrily, his own breath laboring against the effort of rowing. "You can best sit still, now."

But Sheldon was recovered enough to take a place quickly beside Braxton on the narrow seat and relieve him of an oar. Lacey, in the stern, could manage his oars alone.

With three to pull they cut swiftly through the water. Soon they were close enough to see that the two slaves were alive and to hear Hilliard, on the other side, cautioning Shadrach.

"Steady, man, steady. We are clear now. You paddle with one oar; I'll steer with the other. If we can get around this mess without disturbing the water—"

"We're here to help, Father!" Sheldon shouted. "Stay where you are!"

Then everything happened so suddenly that he felt he was living a nightmare. Shadrach must have miscalculated his short strokes or the variable force of the current, for the boat jerked suddenly forward under the compulsion of a quick swell and buried its stubby prow in the wreckage.

A cry, wild as an animal's, broke from Sheldon's throat and a scream of futile warning from Braxton's. They saw a log tumble into the water, and then the pile fell apart, spreading itself with a cracking and crashing of timbers. From the center of the wreckage the carcass of a horse rolled out, four legs, for an instant, grotesquely stiff, in the air.

WHAT Sheldon remembered of the rest of that day was as vague as the black, grief-twisted face of Shadrach's wife, Bessie, and the dim cabin where he sat. He could faintly recall brushing past the moaning slaves, and trudging up the hill with Braxton to Shadrach's cabin. And he remembered gentle, softly spoken words. But they had no ordered place in his confused brain.

The wild scream of a slave, the mournful wailing of the women on the hill, and the bawling of frightened pickaninnies: hideous sounds these were, sharpening their notes against the crashing of logs and timbers and the violent splashing of water. Sheldon knew he would always remember them as a cacophonic prelude to his first realization of the tragedy. He had known that the pile would fall when the boat lurched into it, but he could not believe that Hilliard would fail to beat his way, somehow, back to the surface; that they would not pull him into the boat and take him safely to land. He could understand Shadrach's death, but the restless vitality and strength of his father were never meant to end in death so sudden and unchallenged.

When he had forced himself to look around, he had known that no living thing could survive in the tangled wreckage and churning water, or fight free of its vicious, widening arc. He had scarcely noticed Braxton's stricken face or the gyrations of their boat in the circular current.

When he closed his eyes now, trying to shut out all the horror of the day, light and darkness whirled in wild, concentric patterns. His long body jerked restlessly with the stabbing pain of strained muscles. But the dizziness and the pain meant nothing more to him than the fact that he had rowed about on the flood water near the wreckage like one in a fantastic dream, waiting for the impossible to happen. The sharp discomfort of his body was part of the hideous nightmare that he might awake from in the morning. It was too terrible, too unreasonable to be real.

Bessie's hands on his head were soothing. He heard her sob. She was stroking his head, but he could feel through her rough, strong hands the trembling of her body. He forced his eyes to the door and met only the mournful faces of the slaves, gathered in bewilder-

ment on the threshold. From face to face his eyes moved, wide and miserable and questioning, and he swallowed a lump that rose to choke him. He saw Braxton, hidden in shadow, alone at the foot of the corn-shuck pallet. Why did it have to be father, he thought with impulsive bitterness, and then fled in shame from the thought.

He wouldn't let Braxton see him cry, but he wished that he were in Shipley woods, that he could fling himself onto the cool carpet of leaves and cry until there was no more feeling left in his body. He wouldn't mind if Bessie knew he wanted to cry. She had been weeping for poor, faithful Shadrach and her master as he would weep if the other slaves' and Braxton's presence did not harden him against any sign of weakness.

He rose slowly from the pallet and walked out of the cabin. There was a hard and indomitable quality in his tall figure, and strength in his wide shoulders, partly bared by the open collar of his white linen shirt. He looked much older than his nineteen years. Almost nothing remained of youth in his inflexible eyes and set features.

Braxton moved toward him, out of the shadow. "Shall we go back to the house now? I think you would rest better there—"

Sheldon swept away the suggestion with violence nearly physical. "I'll not rest the night or day or anytime in Shipley! Lacey will tell Abel to pack my chest."

Braxton laid his hand on Sheldon's arm with a gentle, persuasive touch. "I know you are overwrought with grief, but you must realize that this dreadful thing is the will of God and try to accept it with your father's fortitude."

"Don't ask me to believe that my father's death is God's will, Colonel Braxton. There is justice in God's will and none in this. Shipley is cursed by the devil and I'll never spend another night under its roof." Against the pallor of his face his eyes blazed with unfamiliar bitterness.

"We can talk about that some other time," Braxton replied quietly. "For the time being, why don't you come to Chericoke with me? It has always been your second home."

Sheldon gave him a grateful smile. Then an expression of bleak resignation crossed his face. "I wish I could, sir, but I must go to Aunt Florrie. It is a duty I admit I dread. She will not make it any easier to bear."

They walked slowly away from the cabin. "Perhaps you will let me come to Chericoke a little later."

"You are welcome at any time," Braxton said, knowing that Miss Florrie was not the person to give comfort to anyone at a time like this.

3

THEY left for Richmond by coach, Lacey riding Nero and leading Braxton's horse. It was a relief to Sheldon to hear the horses' hooves beating on the Richmond road, pounding out the miles they put between himself and Shipley. Never would he go back to the place. He would keep it running, if only for the sake of Aunt Florrie, his father's sister, much of whose income was dependent on its prosperity; but he would never walk through those halls again and hear them ring with his father's resonant laughter; or ride through the woods, eternally waiting for his father to join him for their gallop across country.

He felt the presence of Braxton beside him, as the only stabilizing thing in his world. Though there were sixteen years' difference in their ages, Braxton had never treated him as a child, as his father's other friends so often did. Even the summer of his ninth birthday, when he had gone to Chericoke with his father and mother, Braxton had talked to him as if he had been a young man, telling him about the settlers who had first come to the colony, living at Jamestown in constant hazard from Indians; giving him a vision of the future when he would be a great planter and sit in the House of Burgesses. He had taught him to recognize the different trees and the names of the birds that darted from the hedges to the arbor. Sheldon had loved their talks as he had his father's stories of famous quarter-races and his tales of the vessels that carried Shipley's crops to distant lands.

He remembered how impressed he had been when his father told him that Colonel Braxton, his brother George and three friends were the only young men who had negro boys in attendance at William and Mary College. He imagined himself cutting a similar dash, with velveteen breeches and embroidered waistcoat; riding

his father's horses and learning to fence.

Now those things made little difference to him. At nineteen he was able to appreciate the shrewd judgment that his father had sought so often in times of uncertainty, and the unquestioning loyalty that he had seemed to rely upon almost as much as the affection and trust of his own family. Perhaps Colonel Braxton had such depths of understanding because he had suffered so much himself. He seemed to know infallibly when one didn't want to talk and when conversation was a welcome distraction. The silence now, as they jolted along the Richmond Road, held no awkwardness.

I guess his loss was almost as great as mine, Sheldon thought. It must be like the time that Judith Braxton died.

As they approached Richmond, he saw that there were few marks of the flood. The town itself, standing aloof and secure on its hills of Shockoe and Richmond, had not felt the rising waters.

"We must break our journey here," Braxton said, speaking for the first time. "Do you fancy the Old City Tavern?"

"I reckon it's as good as any," Sheldon replied. He noticed that there were tired lines beneath Braxton's gray eyes and that his full cheeks sagged with fatigue. "What a thoughtless fool I am," he told himself. "The man must be dog-tired and I have thought of nothing but myself."

He gave a half-crown each to Sam, the coachman, and to Lacey. "Water the horses and feed them before you go to tipping," he ordered. "We start early in the morning."

Although the afternoon was warm, logs blazed high in the fireplace of the Old City Tavern. A half-dozen men sat within its copper glow, drinking ale and discussing the catastrophe up the James. Braxton and Sheldon took a seat in the far corner, hoping to escape the conversation; but the men's voices, excited by drink and the drama of the flood, took possession of the stuffy room.

"It will not be our generation that sees the land in crops again," one opined, rapping the table with his fingers. "There's six feet of sand where the flood's receded, to say naught of the wreckage that's piled on that."

"I hear five hundred or more people have been drowned," another remarked.

Braxton hastily ordered strong tea, biscuits, ham and greens and

began a conversation with Sheldon which he hoped might drown the other. But the discussion of the men continued to reach them with taunting clarity.

"Sam Bowden says the ships at Hadley's docks were torn from their moorings, and the general damage will take a pretty penny to repair." A frown crept over the speaker's leathery features. "I don't doubt it will be us who pays."

A flush crept into Sheldon's high cheek bones. "That's all they think of!" he muttered angrily to Braxton. "The inconvenience. What it'll cost to repair the damage!"

"Colonel Byrd's warehouses are down, but I doubt if he would notice the loss," from another, whose tone of resentment was too much for his listeners to stomach. There was a low chorus of protests, for Colonel Byrd was well-liked and his misfortune was a subject of general sympathy.

Sheldon pushed aside his tea and rose from his chair. "If you will pardon me, sir, I will take the air for a bit. It's stuffy in here and I'm not as hungry as I thought." He could stay in the room no longer unless he rammed his fist in their hot, stupid faces. What did they know of the suffering the flood had wrought; were the loss of crops and warehouses and the killing of pigs and cattle and horses all that mattered? Was the real tragedy the loss in timber and nails and hogsheads of tobacco and the taxes that would be required to repair the public damage? They were blind, unthinking fools! No wonder the King lost patience with such dolts.

He hurried from the tavern, followed by the curious gaze of his unwitting tormenters. Braxton let him go alone. He will find calmness more quickly by himself, he thought, remembering his own struggle to make the difficult readjustment when Judith had died. The mind went round and round, shocked into miserable disorder, clinging to a hope here, a hope there. There were so many emotions at variance; pride that covered shattered nerves and torn heart until the dark hours when the bonds were loosed; the instinctive conviction that the dead expected fortitude of those who were left behind. These battled the desire to find peace of mind the easiest way—to escape, to forget in whatever way one could. Time healed the wound, but it did not weaken the ties. Someday Sheldon would re-

turn to Shipley. He would return in search of something he could find nowhere else in his world.

4

EARLY the next morning, Sheldon and Braxton started on their separate ways. Sheldon was in a deep gloom during the two days of his journey to Fredericksburg. It was wrong of him, he knew, to dread his visit to Aunt Florrie, but the atmosphere she created in the white brick house overlooking the Rappahannock was trivial and irritating. Aunt Florrie had no grasp of any life except the trifling affairs of herself and her friends, the latest plays and current gossip. It seemed incongruous that she was the sister of his father whose life had always been one of restless vitality and whose affairs, and incidentally her income, were bound up so closely with politics and trade.

He knew that Aunt Florrie's visits to Shipley had always tried his father's patience. In desperation, once, he had taken her with him to hear the debate on the Loan Office scheme. That, he said, would make her appreciate the money that flowed into Bellevue with such regularity. When they returned, he could talk of nothing but the proposal to ease the financial embarrassment of the planters, and of Patrick Henry's stubborn opposition.

"Spendthrifts, he calls us. Why, dammit, Florrie, he is a scoundrel and an upstart!" he had cried in a fresh burst of rage, but Aunt Florrie had been content to reply that Mr. Henry was a fascinating man, and that perhaps he had good reason for what he said.

"Fascinating!" Hilliard had retorted. "Florrie, will you only try to understand what is going on about you? Henry's nothing but an up-country storekeeper." He had never again suggested to his sister a venture into the world of affairs.

Aunt Florrie lived in a world of her own which she liked to impose upon everyone who came to Bellevue, but Sheldon was damned if he would live in that world. He knew little of politics himself and had no desire to become embroiled in them, but neither could

he tolerate the idea of hiding his head like an ostrich.

It was hard for Sheldon to remember when Aunt Florrie was a gay, exciting figure to him, but the road from Bowling Green to Fredericksburg was sharpening an indistinct memory. When he was eight, his father and mother and Aunt Florrie had ridden this road to Bellevue in Hilliard's blue and yellow coach drawn by four shining bays. He recalled the slaves lining the drive as they turned into Bellevue, and the tiresome inspection of the house, which was to be a portion of Aunt Florrie's dowry. He remembered her cries of delight at the beautiful furniture, which had recently come from Chippendale in England, and his wonder that the excitement of approaching marriage could make anyone as beautiful as it made Aunt Florrie. He, himself, had never seen Michael Forrest, but his father had said that Michael was one of the handsomest men he had ever set eyes on and that the match was considered a brilliant one.

A month after the betrothal was announced, Forrest took passage in the *Seagull* for London, intending to put his affairs in order before coming to live permanently in Virginia. The vessel set sail one gray October afternoon, and was never heard of again. Aunt Florrie took it surprisingly well. Though she came at once to Shipley, Sheldon never saw her cry, nor did he ever hear her mention Forrest's name. When he was old enough to inquire why Aunt Florrie was still a spinster, his father had told him that she never gave any man the slightest encouragement, and none dared mention the subject of marriage to her. She went to live in the broad white house on the Rappahannock with only her house maid Cora, Hattie, Cappy and a kitchen boy, Cora's son, to run Bellevue. Collin, the overseer, ruled the broad acres of the plantation with a domineering hand. Miss Florrie seldom saw an account book. Such matters might not have gone beyond the knowledge of Collin if Nicholas Hilliard had not taken a hand in the management of his sister's affairs. But when he unearthed one discrepancy after another in Collin's accounts, Miss Florrie still refused to dismiss him, insisting that no one else could manage the field slaves as he did. So Collin stayed and continued to batten off the land, encouraged by Miss Florrie's defense to adopt a more indiscriminate policy than ever.

"That's my responsibility, now," Sheldon thought as he rode into

Fredericksburg late on the evening of June second. Weedon's Tavern was alight, and through the open windows came the friendly sound of laughter and tinkling glasses. He decided to stop in long enough to have a tankard of ale with perhaps a dash of rum to fortify himself against the ordeal he knew was in store for him. A half-breed boy jumped up from the mounting block and Sheldon tossed Nero's reins to him. Now that he was on his feet he realized how tired he was. Every step stirred an abominable aching in his head and his brain was a jumble of confused thoughts.

Within the tap-room there were not more than five or six people. Sheldon sat down at a table by the window. Two men, obviously gentry, were seriously engaged at loo in a corner of the room. At their elbows were two mugs of spiced wine which seemed not to have softened their tempers, for each glowered at the other's winnings without a semblance of humor. The sounds of merriment were coming from three other occupants of the room. One of them was Hugh Mercer, the apothecary, a dark, pleasant-faced man who was regaling his two companions with a rib-splitting story. When Mercer's eyes fell on him, Sheldon wondered if the little doctor would remember the boy of ten who was a guest at Chericoke with his father when Mercer and Colonel Washington stopped for the night on their way to Fredericksburg. He hoped not. He wanted to sit here alone, without talking—without thinking. But it was soon obvious that the doctor did remember him for he rose from his chair and approached him with a quizzical smile. Sheldon stood up, bowed and returned the smile. Mercer's doubts seemed to vanish as he reached the table.

"There's a strong resemblance between father and son, and unless I am mistaken you are Sheldon Hilliard," he observed with a frankly admiring scrutiny of Sheldon's tall figure. "How is my friend Nicholas Hilliard? It's close on two years since I have seen him. You know I'll never forget that Colonel Washington said he wished your father was a pattern in strength and common sense for some of the slow-witted men he was asked to command."

Sheldon felt a quick flush of pride. "You have told me something, sir, which is an honor to my father's memory."

"His memory!" Mercer cried in a low voice. "You mean that your father is dead?"

Sheldon nodded. "May I sit down, sir? I have been in the saddle for two days."

"Of course. Of course. I fear the shock has made me thoughtless." He picked at a button on his waistcoat. "Er—I would like to present you to my friends—if you will join us at our table."

"It would be an honor, sir," Sheldon replied, wishing that he had not been tempted to stop at Weedon's.

Mercer turned a grave face on his two companions.

"Captain Stuart and Mr. Montague, Mr. Hilliard."

The men rose, Montague unsteadily, and acknowledged the introduction with a bow. "I am sorry to say, gentlemen, that Mr. Hilliard has just given me sad news."

It was then that Sheldon realized for the first time that the young man with the round face, dull unsteady eyes and mop of red hair was drunk. Clen Montague said, "Shorry to hear it," bent his head, and seizing his toddy, lifted it shakily to his lips. Drops of it trickled down his linen jabot.

Captain Stuart, who was drinking ale, murmured his regrets.

"I take it you have ridden from Shipley," Mercer said. "What may I order for you?"

"Ale, sir. With a touch of rum."

Montague laughed uneasily. "'Tis like a warming pan after a long night. I suggest a toddy or rumbullion."

"I prefer ale." Sheldon smiled knowingly at Mercer. Then he added, "Colonel Braxton and I came from Shipley together. We parted at Richmond."

Mercer asked guardedly, "Is Colonel Braxton resigned to his—er—temporary retirement from the House of Burgesses?"

"I have not heard him complain," Sheldon defended, a little irritated at the implication. Everyone knew that the feud between Richard Henry Lee and Braxton had not increased the latter's popularity among the electors of King William, but it was not generally understood what motive Lee had for his animosity. It was enough for most when he maintained that in a disagreement on policy between the Crown and the colonies, Braxton would naturally support his father-in-law, Richard Corbin—the King's Receiver-General—against the colonies.

"Colonel Braxton's views have not altered with the times," Mer-

cer went on, amiably hoping to soften what had been taken as criticism. "You have to admire a man who has the strength of his convictions, but when he pulls against the tide of public sentiment, he is bound to suffer political death, unless, of course, the Governor appoints him—"

"You talk, sir, as if the colonies were near to open rebellion," Sheldon returned shortly. "And you are forgetting that Colonel Braxton supported Mr. Henry's resolution against taxation without representation."

"That may be true," Mercer conceded, "but in his general views he does not give the people confidence at a time like this."

"You mean the people are rebellious?" Sheldon pursued.

"They are not exactly jubilant over the massacre in Boston," Captain Stuart interjected.

"But that was last year. Surely if they were going to rebel, they would have done so then."

"They simply exercised remarkable patience," Stuart snapped. "But they have not forgotten."

"Would Virginia rebel because Massachusetts did?"

"If the colonies don't stand together, they'll fall separately," Stuart pronounced solemnly. "But I don't say they will rebel. I simply support Mr. Mercer's contention that the changing times need a change of policy."

During the conversation, Clen Montague consumed another toddy and became increasingly restless and red in the face. Sheldon stole an amused glance at him, noticing that his hair and skin and the whites of his eyes were almost the same color. There was something familiar about him, yet he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Perhaps the last time he had seen him, he had looked less like a stormy sunset.

Suddenly Montague got to his feet, swayed slightly and announced that he was going to step outside for a breath of air. The three men exchanged knowing glances and watched him weave across the room and out the door.

"I seem to remember him," Sheldon said.

Mercer enlightened him. "He's Major Ward's nephew. A nice lad. I've never seen him like this before. Reckon he's trying to sow his oats. Ward keeps a right sharp eye on him most of the time."

Sheldon nodded. "Major Ward brought him to call on Aunt Florrie. That's where I met him. But it was so long ago he doesn't know me."

"I doubt he would know anyone tonight," Stuart laughed.

As abruptly as Montague had left them, he reappeared in the doorway. But the men, turning back to their conversation, did not see him until they heard the crash of pewter and wood and the slap of playing cards on the bare floor. They whirled round in their chairs and Sheldon burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. The two men who had been pursuing their game of loo with such profound seriousness and ill temper were standing enraged over the wreckage of the gaming table. In the middle of it all sprawled Montague.

The bewildered proprietor came from behind the barred cage where he had been dispensing refreshment. Waving his arms in wild confusion he summoned servants from right and left, endeavoring at the same time to pacify his outraged patrons.

" 'Tis a pity one can't enjoy a game of cards without the drunken interference of such louts!"

" 'Tis monstrous!"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! The damage will be repaired," the proprietor cried in consternation.

"But I was winning! You can't repair that, you dunderhead." The larger and more violent of the two thrust his livid countenance at the startled proprietor.

In the meantime, Montague struggled to his feet, somewhat sobered by his fall. Sheldon and Stuart had already come forward, flanking him on each side to prevent any further catastrophe, but Montague was not intimidated.

"Call me a lout, sir!" He staggered forward threateningly, ludicrous in his stained, ill-fitting clothes, with an unruly lock of red hair hanging down his forehead.

Sheldon clamped strong hands on his pudgy arms, spun him around and steered him toward the door. "I'll take him home. It's on my way," he called to Stuart over his shoulder.

MISS FLORRIE'S usual stoicism deserted her at the news of her brother's death. She took to her bed and would see no one except Cora, who was allowed to come in with a tray of food once a day. Sheldon paced the hall outside her door, hoping that she would call for him; pouncing on Cora when she left the room.

"Is she all right, Cora? I mean does she seem to be better?"

"She don say nothin', Marse Sheldon. Dat's de trouble. She jes lay der lookin' at de ceilin' wid her lips movin'," Cora whined, bewildered and frightened, for she had never known Miss Florrie ever to give way to sickness or grief.

After the first two days, Sheldon could stand it no longer. "If I could help," he kept saying. "If I could only help." Suddenly he had an intense urge to be out of the house, off the plantation. When Aunt Florrie wanted him she would send for him.

He went out to the stables and got Nero. He hadn't thought he would be so glad to be astride his horse again. Setting off vaguely down the locust-lined drive toward the Fredericksburg road he thought of Clen Montague. If Clen was sober, he might be distracting company. A promise of humor had lurked behind the hazy intoxication of his small brown eyes, and he was near enough Sheldon's age to afford him some companionship during these dreary days.

The earth was hot under a scorching sun when he rode through the great iron gates of Major Ward's plantation. Ahead of him the red brick house stood square and solid with shutters closed against the afternoon heat. Parched corn in the field to his right gave the land a drab look, but to the left, the woods were cool and inviting. He was gazing idly through the stand of spruce when he saw Clen, seeming to appear from nowhere, lift his horse over the four rail fence and pull up directly in front of him on the road. His face had its usual high flush, but his red hair was caught neatly at the back with a brown ribbon and he sat his horse with easy composure. Sheldon smiled to himself as he spurred Nero ahead to meet him.

"Aha! My benefactor!" Clen cried.

"At your service." Sheldon bowed deeply in the saddle, unable to restrain a short laugh.

"Thank God, I do not require your service today," Clen smiled sheepishly, drawing abreast of Sheldon. "Egad, what a head I had yesterday. I rode all over Piper's Landing, thinkin' the air would do me good, but all I got for my pains were two hard falls. Couldn't seem to stick in the saddle."

Sheldon laughed unsympathetically. There was something ridiculously funny to him in the thought of the stout young man, pinched in his brown corduroy coat, sprawling through the air.

"I'm still sore," Clen complained, rubbing his chest and paunch. "But I'm sober, as you can see for yourself, sir. Reckon I don't drink enough to hold it gracefully."

"Good drinkers are born," Sheldon reflected aloud. "My father could consume as much as any man I ever saw, yet I never remember him showing any symptoms of it except in the eyes. They seemed to shrink."

"I drink when I'm scared," Clen confessed.

Sheldon gave him a teasing look. "What were you scared of the other evening? Seemed to me you were right hilarious when I came in."

"Wasn't any confidence behind my humor. My uncle sent me to Weedon's to deliver a message to Captain Stuart. Sort of aide-de-camp duty that ill-suited me. The Captain kept lookin' at me like he'd give his right arm to have me in his company. Rather unnerved me, I reckon, so I got drunk. Now I'm prayin' never to see him again."

"You didn't put up much of a struggle once I got you out of the Tavern," Sheldon enlightened him. "Can you remember the bedlam we left behind us?"

"Don't ask me to remember it," Clen groaned. "I have a vague memory of interrupting a game of loo. 'Tis just as well. Mr. Ashton and Mr. Page are notoriously bad losers to each other, and one of them must have been mightily pleased."

"They didn't sound like it," Sheldon told him.*

They rode up to the house, dismounted and gave their horses to a waiting negro boy. Clen led the way up the semi-circular stone steps into the welcome cool of the high-ceiled hall.

At the sound of their voices, Major Ward came out of the library, holding the small volume he had been reading. The tapping

of his wooden leg on the polished floor was more familiar to Sheldon than the intense blue eyes, thin mouth and square, stubborn chin, although he remembered how, when he was a small boy, these strong hard-set features had subdued him. Now the Major was in his sixties and his sandy hair was thinning, but he still carried himself with the unmistakable bearing of a soldier.

"So you are back," he said to Clen in a martinet's voice. However, Sheldon noticed a sparkle of good humor in his eyes.

Sheldon took an instant, inexplicable liking to the man who had made no such favorable impression upon him as a boy.

Ward studied him with a puzzled eye. Finally he snapped, "Are you not going to present your friend, Clenleigh?"

Clen winced, as he always did at the sound of his unabbreviated name. "I ask your pardon, sir, but you have met before. This is Sheldon Hilliard."

"Nicholas Hilliard's son? Impossible! I beg your pardon—er—I used to call you Sheldon, and dammit, I'll do so now! The last time I saw you, you came no higher than my shoulder and had an insatiable curiosity about this." He tapped his wooden leg unself-consciously. "I won't forget you again, for by all the laws of nature, boy, you can grow no taller."

Clen, sensing that his uncle's first thought would be to inquire for Nicholas Hilliard, shot the old soldier a look that puzzled and silenced him for several minutes. In the meantime Clen suggested, "May we sit down in the coolest room in the house, Uncle Ben? It's hot as blazes outside."

"The east parlor," Major Ward muttered. He indicated the room to Sheldon and invited, "Will you lead the way?"

Hobbling beside Clen, he whispered in his nephew's ear, "What ails you?"

"His father's just been killed. Don't know how. I was afraid you might inquire for him, sir."

Ward's face betrayed his shock for the briefest moment, then cleared as he addressed himself to Sheldon. "How is Miss Florrie? I have attempted on several occasions to see her, but she always has some thin excuse. I fear she suspects me of wishing to press my suit."

Sheldon smiled compassionately. "I wish you could press it suc-

cessfully, sir, but she is difficult to reason with."

"Her nephew's blessings will give me renewed courage." Ward smiled, his sharp eyes twinkling.

Sheldon coughed uneasily. "She is mourning my father's death," he said simply. "I was obliged to bring her the sad tidings."

To Ward, as an officer in Braddock's army, death was not unfamiliar, but he had never learned to accustom himself to the loss of friends. "Perhaps we can lighten your grief somewhat," he said kindly. "I hope you will give us the opportunity."

"I don't go back to college till the end of summer," Clen told him.

"College?" Sheldon questioned.

"William and Mary, my second year. It would suit you admirably, Sheldon."

"My father always said that college was a waste of time. He believed you had to learn by experience, anyway, so why waste four years getting a theoretical understanding of life. He was educated at Oxford. I reckon he didn't like it."

"Experience is a very important part of life," Ward agreed, "but you can't sit down and wait for it. You must lay the foundation carefully. We all have to do it. Your father would never have been capable of managing his affairs as he did without that education. What do you know now of mathematics and history? Those things are of fundamental importance."

"I don't see why, sir."

"Damme, boy. For accounts, trading, for being a planter, unless you wish to be robbed by all the scalawags waiting to put their hands in your pockets. For understanding the times we are living in. You can't understand the present unless you can see how the past is repeating itself."

Clen laughed softly. "That is not the reason I would suggest for your coming to William and Mary College." He gave Sheldon a sly wink.

"Don't be facetious!" Ward retorted. "Your education is a pretty expense to take so lightly."

"Oh, I don't take it lightly." Clen retreated from his frivolous mood, trying to forestall the old argument with his uncle. "There are many things we take quite seriously."

"Yes," his uncle snorted. "Like robbing the mails and scattering the contents over the Duke of Gloucester Street."

"I had no hand in that!" Clen feigned indignation, for the episode had been highly amusing at the time. He could still see invoices and bills of lading fluttering about the street pursued by outraged guardians of His Majesty's Post, and Southall raging in the Raleigh Tavern, after his box had been broken open. When times were dull, the students had to concoct their own amusement. "The College takes what you call 'the growing uneasiness' very seriously," Clen pointed out.

"You mean your firebrand professors like James Innis use you as a testing ground for their revolutionary nonsense," Ward retorted.

"But I thought you agreed that there was discontent, sir—"

"Of course there's discontent! But there's a sane-minded solution of it." Ward turned to Sheldon. "Your father was a Royalist. He would have been much troubled by the rising tendency to blame all ills on the King. Sober reflection is giving way to a spirit of defiance. Look at them down in North Carolina. Little up-country farmers and tradesmen don't like the price they get for their wheat and the taxation for Governor Tryon's palace, so they rise against him with pikes and muskets. Regulators, they call themselves!"

Sheldon took in the Major's words with a serious face. Odd his father had never discussed these things with him. At Shipley there had never been talk of anything but crops, land; building and livestock; of ships for trade with England. Of course, his father's friends had often been disgruntled over taxes and the high-handed policy of the Parliament in London, but as far as rising against the King or his Governors was concerned—Hilliard wouldn't have stood for mention of it. If what Major Ward hinted was true—that the colonists were apt to seek compromise by force—it was perhaps a blessing that his father was dead.

Clen wiggled nervously in his chair. The conversation had gotten out of control. He began to smile awkwardly. "If you would keep abreast of the times, you had best go back to college with me, Sheldon."

"And learn the art of seducing every tavern wench who takes your fancy!" Ward snorted.

Sheldon could not join in Clen's amusement. His father would not have thought the picture, as Major Ward painted it, very amusing.

6

MISS FLORRIE was in bed a week. Then she appeared suddenly at supper, as if nothing had happened. She and Sheldon sat at opposite ends of the polished mahogany table. The light of the candles, burning high in the square-based silver candlesticks, softened the angular lines of her cheeks and thin, high-bridged nose. But her mouth, colorless and severe, and her sharp black eyes warned Sheldon of the approaching storm. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, wishing that he could finish his chicken in peace and enjoy the superb Madeira. Such wine was meant to put one in a conciliatory frame of mind, but Aunt Florrie was on the war-path.

She spoke with a slow sigh Sheldon had grown to accept as a tactical maneuver. Aunt Florrie would sound hurt, resigned to neglect. It was a flank attack, which would gradually build up into a direct, frontal attack.

"Have you made plans?" she inquired.

"Tentative plans," he parried.

"Might I ask what they are?"

"I have been thinking of going to William and Mary College." It angered him that he should feel obliged to break the news gently as if he had no right to make his own decisions.

"You have seen Clenleigh Montague," she asserted, pursing her mouth.

"Yes. You disapprove of him, Aunt Florrie?"

"He is a brainless young fool," she pronounced with finality.

"I find him amusing. I seem to know few people of my own age who think of anything but dancing and the latest London fashions." Sheldon felt his skin grow hot and hoped that his annoyance was not too obvious. Aunt Florrie took force from the adversary's discomfiture.

She grunted. "I always told your father he made a mistake filling his house with nothing but dull old men."

"Aunt Florrie, they weren't dull, and you can't call Colonel Braxton and Mr. Randolph and men like that old."

"Can't I? When I was nineteen, I thought anyone that age had one foot in the grave. I consider young Mr. Mann Page and Mr. Carter Burwell more suitable as companions for you, and your father should have seen that you met them."

"Mann Page is a fop and so is Carter Burwell."

"Sheldon, it's ignorant of you to make such a remark. Just because they are not uncouth like your Clenleigh Montague—"

"I shall make a point of meeting them," he compromised.

"When are you leaving me?"

"I had thought to go to Chericoke next week, Aunt Florrie."

"What of Shipley?"

"Bacon is trustworthy. He will continue to manage the plantation and Colonel Braxton has offered to help me settle father's affairs. As far as living at Shipley is concerned, nothing could induce me to do it now."

Miss Florrie turned the thin-stemmed glass of wine in her long fingers. "I do not like to see you run away from your duty."

Sheldon flushed a deep crimson. Aunt Florrie was right. He was running away from his duty, but even the shame of knowing it couldn't send him back. He had thought of selling Shipley, but whenever he contemplated losing the land that was his birthright, he could hear his father saying again, "Land is the only thing that matters. Your own land is your kingdom. I'd as soon lose my soul as lose mine."

"I can't go back," he said quietly, knowing that his bare statement was inadequate.

It surprised him that Miss Florrie didn't take it up and worry it like a dog with a bone; but she let it go unchallenged and said, instead, "Then your place is at Bellevue. I will have the office repaired and you can take full charge of the plantation."

Aunt Florrie had launched her frontal attack, and Sheldon didn't know what answer to make that would convince her of the importance he attached to his independence. He would be unable to stay here without reorganizing the management of the plantation and then she would claim that he must see his plan through. He would be caught in Aunt Florrie's life, bound to her domineering demands.

Provocative thought would be a rarity and he would never know where he stood on any issue of importance. If trouble arose, as Mr. Mercer and Captain Stuart had suggested, he would fumble in the dark for understanding, for Aunt Florrie would hear no word against the King and tolerate no mention of rebellion. He looked up slowly to meet his aunt's quizzical gaze and had the uncomfortable suspicion that she had read his thoughts.

"I will stay with you for the present," he said miserably. "But I am going to Williamsburg in the autumn."

Miss Florrie drained the last drop of Madeira from her glass. "I suppose you must continue your education," she conceded.

PART II

SEEDS OF DISCORD

TOWARD the end of summer, anxiety over the devastating effects of the great fresh had worn itself out, giving way to more sober concern over the shortage of crops. Shipments of tobacco, corn and wheat fell to half their normal levels while the demand for these commodities almost doubled. Had it not been for the decision of the Assembly to grant a loan of thirty thousand pounds to the planters whose crops and warehouses had been destroyed, the lords of the upper James and Pamunkey would have found themselves in bankruptcy.

Everywhere, the lull in political events was arousing suspicion. Save for the flood, the tranquil way of Virginia life had not been seriously agitated since the boycott of English goods in September of the year before, but all around the Colony trouble was brewing. New England still seethed menacingly over the Boston Massacre, and the aftermath of the rebellion against Governor Tryon in North Carolina was heavy with portent. Even to the Church tranquillity was denied as the fight for an American episcopate began. Peace in Virginia was enjoyed to the fullest with a sense of gratitude for a short-lived blessing as it became increasingly evident that she could not stand alone and serene through the storm. The theaters were filled and there was a continual round of gaiety.

Bellevue, it seemed to Sheldon, followed in the wake of the general unrest, and Miss Florrie fed the fires of discontent with increasing disregard for his position on the plantation and for the security of Bellevue. His mind was still so filled with the bitterly tense scenes with Collin over the accounts and Miss Florrie's stubborn refusal to dismiss him, in spite of the evidence that Sheldon brought before her eyes, that he could think of nothing else. He felt his duty strongly to protect her; to divide his time between his own affairs and hers, with Braxton's sound assistance, but his hands were bound.

One hot September afternoon Sheldon faced Collin in the office,

before Miss Florrie, with the discrepancy in the shipment of tobacco to London in July, and the shipment that should have been available according to the estimate of the crop. Miss Florrie said there must have been a mistake in the estimate and that she was convinced Collin knew what he was doing.

"I will find out where he has sold the rest of the crop, Aunt Florrie. Perhaps that will convince you that you are allowing this man to rob you."

"Nonsense," she retorted, and Collin's close-set gray eyes flashed with triumph, while his full mouth settled into a sardonic smirk. Sheldon took a step toward him. His own eyes blazed with desire to throttle the man. His hands, doubled into hard fists at his sides, ached with the restraint he put upon them. Not a muscle moved in Collin's face, but his eyes narrowed and hardened before he lowered them to the dusty tips of his boots.

"Get out of here!" Sheldon cried, "before I throw you out."

"Sheldon! How dare you speak like that in this house!" Miss Florrie stood up, trembling with anger and fear that he would carry out his threat right there, before her.

Collin raised his eyes, looked directly past Sheldon to Miss Florrie. "Have I your permission to go, ma'am?"

"Yes go, for Heaven's sake."

When they were alone, Sheldon walked to the fireplace and resting his arm along the mantel, stared into the empty grate. Miss Florrie dropped back into her chair and drummed nervously on the red morocco arms. "I don't understand how you could so forget yourself."

He had never known Aunt Florrie to speak to him more in the tone of one scolding an undisciplined schoolboy. When he half-turned to look at her, it was difficult to keep the rage he felt out of his voice. "It is as well for you to know," he began icily, "that there is no longer room on this plantation for Collin and me. I cannot stand by and see him cheat and rob you, and yet when I bring you the evidence you defend him. Defend him against me!" His voice rose to an angry pitch. He stomped over to the desk and thumbed the papers that lay there. "Here is proof enough for anyone that the man should be dismissed, and when you told me that I was to have full charge here, that is what I intended to do. To throw him

off this land, and shoot him if he ever came back." Miss Florrie started to speak, but he silenced her with raised hand. "The plantation is not big enough to support you, Aunt Florrie. You know that. And according to Collin's accounts, the crops are dwindling every year. My father told you what he was. Now I am only trying to protect you in my father's place. But you won't let me."

"Collin knows how to handle the negroes," she claimed, stubbornly. "And anyhow, I won't have you speaking the way you did, like a—like a ruffian."

"That is the only language Collin understands," he cried harshly. Then he moved from the desk to the fireplace, standing with his back against the mantel. "He is going to make trouble for you unless he is watched, Aunt Florrie. Serious trouble."

"I think you exaggerate," she persisted.

Sheldon gave in with a shrug of his shoulders. There was nothing more to be said. He had done all that he could. The next move would have to be made when Aunt Florrie saw for herself what was happening under her nose. When the revenue from her crops became so small that even a child would suspect—

"I am leaving next week," he announced quietly.

"You aren't really going?" She leaned forward, lacing her fingers tightly in her lap.

"You knew I was, Aunt Florrie. I told you so when I came here."

"But I thought you'd change your mind when you saw how lonely I was."

He looked long at her face and felt only pity for her unreasonableness. She was getting old, and yet she wasn't much more than fifty. All the sparkle that used to light her dark eyes was gone, and there was a pattern of broken veins in her high-boned cheeks. Only her hair and her long, delicate hands remained beautiful. Of course, she was lonely. She had made this life for herself, deciding on it when she was too young to understand what an unhappy, dull existence it might become. His teeth flashed in a sudden smile. "Aunt Florrie, we'd always be at loggerheads about something. But that is not the reason I am going. As I told you, I am enrolling in William and Mary College. I should have done it two years ago. But there is still time for me to try to train myself for some place in the Colony."

"You are going to Chericoke," she retorted. "That is where your opinions will be formed! You will take advice from an outsider before you will from your own family."

Sheldon gave way to irrepressible exasperation. "Oh, Aunt Florrie, won't you try to understand? Of course, Colonel Braxton knows more of what's happening in the Colony than we do. If I take his advice, that is the reason, but it doesn't mean that I am so shallow-witted I cannot think for myself—make my own decisions."

Miss Florrie's glance was sharp. "I hope your decisions will make you happier than they have made me."

He couldn't help smiling at her determination to throw the last dart. Stepping to her side, he bent down and pressed his cheek against her hair, but she moved away from him.

"Don't try to humor me that way, Sheldon!"

Suddenly she was on her feet and hurrying from the office. Sheldon stood in the doorway and watched her go along the path, skirt swishing angrily and her back stiff as a ramrod.

2

WHEN Judith Braxton had died, bearing Carter's second daughter, Braxton—wanting escape, as Sheldon wanted it now—had fled to England, returning two years later to a marriage of convenience with Richard Corbin's daughter, Elizabeth. Together, they were plunged into a life of gaiety and extravagance; but there were moments of frantic loneliness when he floundered in memories of his and Judith's brief, consuming love and the thought of what their life together might have been. In desperation, he had sold Elsing Green, which had become the symbol of a haunting loss, and had built Chericoke.

Time and Elizabeth worked their charm. He began to absorb the contentment she created so carefully around him; he no longer looked upon their entertainments, their gaiety as a palliative. He smiled often with delight and approval of her quiet wit, her confident advice on business and plantation affairs, and of the great boxes that came on the ships from England, laden with evidence of her fine taste. A childish quality of pleasure in her, provoked

him to lavish the most beautiful of imported silks and satins and laces upon her, and to give orders for the skillfully cut crystal candelabra, the Stourbridge glass and heavy curtain brocades that filled the boxes.

His new life settled well upon him. He danced as well as he rode, talked as well as he danced, and if his friends laughingly called him the King William dandy he was not offended by their allusion to his splendor of dress and manners. Gradually the inheritance of a great estate, the responsibilities of a family, and later, political life, replaced the cloak of superficiality with stronger fabric. It took long hours of thinking and management to increase, or at least to keep intact, the accumulated fortune dropped into his lap. Bad crop years, fluctuating trade, the loss of ships at sea could not be taken lightly. In his personal relations he became more serious, inquiring and compassionate, retaining his charm, but very little of the infectious gaiety Elizabeth had nurtured so skilfully.

He could still feel abundant pride and pleasure when the walls of Chericoke resounded with the voices of his friends in political discussion; and with the music of violin and flute and gay party laughter. He loved to stroll along the dock and watch the loading of his tobacco and corn; to let his glance wander over his land and tell himself that he was master of a sizable domain to which he intended adding as the years went on, until he should be able to hand down to his sons an inheritance even greater than his own had been. He had gone as far afield as the western territory of Ohio, thinking to have a share of the America that was moving westward. With Richard and ten others of the Corbins, John Blair, the Henrys, the Burwells, he applied to Governor Dunmore for the vast tract of 59,000 acres which had been surveyed along the Louisa River. Refusal of the application infuriated him, but he still had his great up-country tract: 12,000 acres of the best land, requiring fifty hands to work it.

This was the life into which Sheldon rode late in September. Not very different in ease and luxury from his own, to be sure; but bearing the influence of an understanding woman—a blessing he had not known since he was ten years old, when Deborah Hilliard died after long weeks of an illness, vaguely diagnosed as “the fever.” The thought gave him a feeling of security as he came within sight of

the plantation over a sandy road rutted by coach wheels. Sheldon patted Nero's steaming neck and drew rein. He raised himself in the stirrups and looked over the hedges to the broad fields. Beyond him he could see the greathouse with its office and kitchen detached on each side by twenty feet of brown earth driveway. The other outbuildings lay to right and left at some distance, and over them all the setting sun cast a golden light. He was gazing so intently at his destination that he neither saw nor heard the coach that drew up behind him until it had stopped. When he turned around, the dome-shaped head of Mr. Eustice Buford was thrust out above the door of the coach.

Sheldon turned his horse around and bowed from the saddle. "Good afternoon, sir. This is a very pleasant surprise for me." Suddenly he realized that the coach had another occupant—a young lady he would have given a great deal not to meet on this, of all days.

"Evelyn and I have been journeying from Philadelphia and we were tempted to beg the Colonel's hospitality for a night."

"I'm sure he will be delighted to see you," Sheldon said, telling himself that if Buford had left his hot-headed daughter at home, *he* would have been delighted to see him, too.

"Will you lead the way, sir?" he invited.

The coach moved on, Sheldon following at a distance to avoid the dust its wheels stirred up.

Why had this happened to him, Sheldon thought, bridling at the remembrance of his last meeting with Evelyn Buford two years ago at Chericoke. She had taken no pains to conceal her resentment of the fact that he had been allowed to listen to the conversation of the men while she had been obliged to sit with the ladies. Why she had found this so irksome, he didn't know, but he had caught her, once, listening at the library door, and when he had teased her about it, her brown eyes had burned with fury and she had turned and walked off without a word. Since that moment she had never voluntarily spoken to him.

Suddenly, with a shrug, he threw off his perplexity. What did he care what she thought! He had come to visit the Braxtons and she wasn't going to interfere with that pleasure.

He tried not to remember the other impression she had made on

him the first time they had met, when he had been unable to take his eyes from hers for wondering at the intensity of their brownness and the reflection of candlelight seeming to set them afire. He would never say that she was beautiful, though Elizabeth Braxton told him he obviously did not have his father's eye for beauty. Her figure, in a tight-bodied dress, was a little too slight for his liking. He preferred a more rounded figure. But he had to admit that her provocative smile and the soft coloring of her skin would captivate anyone who had a mind to overlook her mercurial moods, the impatient toss of her dark head when she was angered and her infernal meddling in the affairs of men.

When Buford and Evelyn stepped from the coach, a perfunctory nod was her only greeting to Sheldon. He dismounted and bowed in return with elaborate formality and a teasing smile. For his part, he would just as soon she knew he had no intention of taking the silent feud seriously.

Braxton's Sam came down the steps to take their portmanteaux, followed by his master, who, Sheldon thought, watching him greet his unexpected guests, had more spontaneous social grace than any man he'd ever known except his own father.

"What a delightful surprise, Eustice, and my dear Evelyn!" Braxton cried. "And Sheldon! I'm glad you've come back to us."

Eustice's smile did little to relieve the severity of his rather cadaverous face, but he seemed in fine humor which was always a relief to Braxton.

Eustice said, apologetically, "Unexpected guests can be a monstrous nuisance, but we couldn't resist the temptation to pay you a visit."

"And about time," Braxton rebuked him, and taking his arm, led him into the house. "Elizabeth will be here in a moment. She has been puttering in the garden all day. Do you realize it has been close on a year since we have seen you? Elizabeth was asking about you only the other day."

"It seems longer than that to me, Carter. I would not recommend the northern colonies as a steady diet. They haven't learned the art of leisurely living."

Carter laughed. "I reckon Virginia has spoiled us both, Eustice."

They went into the small drawing-room off the hall in which

Elizabeth had arranged, with her infallible sense of comfort and charm, some of Chippendale's simplest and most beautiful furniture.

Eustice sank onto the sofa and seemed to muse, wrinkling his high brow in a series of furrows. "Yes. I hope she will survive the vicissitudes of these times. We heard talk of nothing in June but the flood. Tell me, Carter, how did it affect the colony?"

"Mercifully, the flood was checked at the Falls," Braxton told him, his mind working to change the subject until he could tell him of Hilliard's death.

Sheldon rested an elbow on his crossed legs and stared at his folded hands. Once he looked up and caught Evelyn's eye. He fancied that it was a curiously appraising glance and then she spoke, spreading the wide skirt of her green woolen traveling dress as if to draw attention to herself. "What we heard was monstrous exciting—and terrible, wasn't it, Father?"

"Yes. Yes. Terrible." Eustice turned to Sheldon. "I hope Shipley did not suffer much damage—"

"Eustice!" Braxton began, but Sheldon interrupted, drawing back in his chair.

"The flood wiped Shipley from the earth, sir, as far as I'm concerned. My father was killed trying to save two of the slaves." The words came out slowly, one behind the other, in solemn, toneless order.

For a moment silence held the bright drawing-room in a breathless grip. Eustice's gaunt features were suffused with purple and Evelyn's eyes, meeting Sheldon's squarely now, were wide and baffled with horror.

"It isn't possible," she breathed.

"My dear boy, forgive me," Eustice floundered. "I am overwhelmed with sorrow. Nicholas Hilliard—why—I heard no word of it at all—you must have thought me inexcusably callous."

"Not at all, sir. It would be hard to believe if you had heard of it," Sheldon reassured him quietly.

Eustice mumbled a reply and turned on Evelyn a glance whose meaning was unmistakable. But if he had had doubts of her behavior toward Sheldon, they were quickly dispelled, for he surprised in her face an expression of contrition.

When Elizabeth Braxton came into the room, a sense of indescribable relief settled on Sheldon. She would know how to turn the conversation to pleasant things, to infect them all with her gay spirit and infinite gentleness. He stood up, waiting for her to notice him, but her eyes had fallen first on Eustice and Evelyn and she was greeting them as if their arrival were a long-awaited pleasure. At length she saw him.

"Sheldon!" She took his outstretched hands. "This is all too exciting for one day. Carter, why didn't you tell me Sheldon was coming!"

"Because I didn't know it myself," Braxton laughed.

She held Sheldon at arm's length and her violet eyes studied his face as if to search out the effect of a tragedy she could not yet bring herself to mention.

Then she turned, smiling, to Eustice. "You must forgive me if I neglect you for a moment. I haven't seen Sheldon since before I went to Laneville."

Braxton gave her a quick, affectionate glance and sitting down between Evelyn and her father, began to question Eustice on affairs in New York.

Elizabeth turned back to Sheldon. How handsome he is, she thought. The high forehead and steady green eyes are so like Nicholas; but there is something else—his mother's sensitive qualities. They are in his mouth; his whole expression. But he is so thin and there is a sadness in his face. She thought of all the rich food she would have that would fatten him; of the quiet walks they would take together. She would turn her frail, shy George over to him and Sheldon would teach him to shoot and to ride as he himself did.

"You are going to pay us a real visit this time, aren't you, Sheldon?" she asked, drawing him down beside her on the sofa.

"It won't be a real visit to me, ma'am. I have only four days before enrolling at William and Mary College."

He wished, as she seemed to, that his visit were to be indefinite. He had come to her like this at many troubled times when he would have gone to Aunt Florrie if she had been more understanding. As a small boy, he had gone to his mother like this, aware, even then, of the infinite gulf between the man's and the woman's power to understand the secret anguish of the heart.

Elizabeth felt no shyness about her affection for Sheldon. Her own three sons were too young to have his companionable qualities, to share her pleasures and gossip as he did. He could be as disarmingly gay as his father had been and she had always had a weakness for Nicholas with his tall, robust figure and thatch of thick, blond hair.

"So you are going to William and Mary College," Elizabeth mused. "I suppose that is wise. I hear," she added, "that it is a hot-bed of young Whigs."

Sheldon laughed. "And you are afraid I may become one of them, ma'am?"

"Not with your background." She laid her hand softly over his. "I hope you will cultivate the wonderful judgment and discrimination that your father always showed in troubled times, Sheldon."

"I would like to be the man my father was," he replied simply. "But I think he was more of a philosopher than I can ever be."

Elizabeth studied her long, slender fingers for a moment, embarrassed by Sheldon's penetrating gaze.

When she looked up and caught Sheldon's eye, she colored faintly. His admiration was so unguarded, she turned to Eustice in refuge from a sudden flurry of excitement.

"Sheldon tells me he is going to William and Mary College."

Eustice nodded solemnly. "He goes in good company—for the most part."

"Do you exclude the conservative students?" Braxton laughed.

"I exclude them," Eustice admitted, "because I am not sure whether they are conservative or fear-ridden."

Braxton began to redden ominously and Elizabeth realized with alarm that he and Eustice would be off on their old argument unless she could devise a way to stop it.

"But Sheldon has always been conservative, Father," Evelyn said, apparently unmindful, when she had spoken, of the glance that Eustice intended to silence her. "And I don't think he seems a bit fear-ridden."

"Hardly," Eustice admitted in a tone calculated to bring the conversation to a close. "Sheldon, unlike the others, is capable of weighing the facts."

The object of their discussion struggled against a smile. He wasn't

certain whether Evelyn was in a devilish humor, or whether she had innocently embarrassed her father, but he was not surprised when Elizabeth rose from the sofa and said to the Bufords, "I know you must both be weary from your journey—shall I have Sam show you to your rooms?"

The alacrity with which Eustice responded, "We are, rather, Elizabeth," left no doubt in Sheldon's mind that the conversation between Evelyn and her father, above stairs, would be well worth hearing.

When Eustice and Evelyn had left, Braxton gave way to a sigh that came from the depths of his patience.

"I don't know why I like that man," he said. "We see eye to eye on nothing."

Elizabeth bent over him and took his shoulders in a firm grasp. "You must be tolerant, Carter. He feels as strongly about his views as you do about yours."

"He is a political fool," Braxton muttered.

Elizabeth put her lips to his forehead. "Perhaps he is, but you must promise me not to get into an argument with him, Carter. I really can't bear it."

"I won't. I won't," Braxton promised, somewhat petulantly. "But I will not have him filling Sheldon's head with Whig nonsense."

"Yours is the only opinion I care for," Sheldon assured him quickly. "Yours and Miss Elizabeth's." He paused, hoping the request he was about to make was not too abrupt. "Would you mind if I took a walk, Miss Elizabeth? I just feel I'd like to—"

Elizabeth interrupted, "Of course, I don't mind. Supper won't be ready for at least an hour."

Sheldon was glad to be alone at last.

3

For once, Sheldon thought, solitude would be welcome. There would be little respite from provocative conversation, yet he was glad, on the whole, that the Bufords were here. There would be talk of politics—endless talk and argument, for Eustice's radical views on the government of the colonies always roused Braxton to heated

dissension. One could not brood in a stormy atmosphere, and the battle of wits and logic had a salutary effect. It made one's own thinking clearer, though God knew what he would ever think of but the flood and Shipley and his father. Eventually, he reflected, he would have to think about what he was going to do now that his familiar world was in chaos. And there was Aunt Florrie.

He strode briskly on toward the dock. A sight of the river, and perhaps a ship or two sailing up the Pamunkey like white gulls, would make him think of those far-off lands he longed to see. London, Paris, Vienna—why shouldn't he go? There was nothing to hold him here. Perhaps in Europe he would forget.

He strolled along the dock, nodding to the indolent, singing slaves who seemed to have nothing better to do on this warm afternoon than to sit dangling their feet over the water, their canvas shirts a patchwork of bright colors, swaying with the rhythm of their chants. At the end of the dock he sank onto a coil of hawser. The odor of horse sweat and saddle leather still clung to his stained breeches, but it was too peaceful and cool here to worry about making himself presentable. He leaned back on his elbow and listened to the soft, melodious voices. How they must spirit trouble away with those songs, he thought; and then, abruptly they stopped. He glanced curiously over his shoulder and saw that Evelyn was coming toward him down the dock, a slender, eager figure in her green dress and pale yellow fichu. He sprang up from the hawser and went to meet her, oblivious of the slaves and their puzzled gaze. For a moment she was too breathless to speak.

"Evelyn, what are you doing here?" he asked. Annoyance at her intrusion was in his stern mouth and frowning eyes.

Now that she was here, she scarcely knew what to say. She wanted to talk to him, but in her haste she had made it appear that she had urgent news.

"I wanted to tell you I am sorry I was rude," she murmured, discomfited. Then, unable to restrain her remorse, she flew on: "Oh, Sheldon, to think I mentioned the flood so callously when—when it had meant so great a loss to you. The more I realized it, I could think only of finding you and begging you to forgive me." Her eyes, gentle with a compassion that seemed strangely unfamiliar, clung to his for an answer.

"It's kind of you, Evelyn," he said awkwardly. Her sympathy and apology touched him so deeply that he was at a loss for words. He did not know her like this and had no answer for the soft, upturned face that held so much concern for him. He could better brook her anger; like this, he could almost love her. "I was monstrous tired when we met, but I reckon that doesn't excuse my manners."

"I did not notice them," she lied. "I was so busy with my own trivial thoughts. If you but knew the shame I felt—" She turned away from him, but he could see, even in profile the sudden coloring of her cheeks and the rapid rise and fall of her small, firm breasts against the tight bodice of her dress.

"Come," he said softly, reaching out to take her hand. "I was going to stroll through the woods. Will you go with me?" He gave her his arm and they walked back along the dock, past the still silent slaves.

She smiled up at him gratefully. "I don't know why we quarrel. It's childish, I suppose."

"Childish of us both," he confessed. "But we will forget that we fought like cat and dog."

"I will gather morning glories," she cried, unaccountably happy. "They will look lovely in Mrs. Braxton's parlor."

Her excitement stirred him to a pace she could scarcely follow in her small high-heeled slippers. In spite of their bickering and fighting, their incessant animosity, there was a quality about her that affected him like wine in his blood. She was tempestuous, uncontrolled—and lovely, he admitted, almost grudgingly. Well, he would never fall in love with Evelyn if he wanted peace of mind, but she was agreeable company when she wanted to be.

"Sheldon, you walk too fast," she panted, and he slowed his gait, laughing at her breathlessness.

"Shall I carry you?" he teased.

A retort sprang to her lips, for the smile that crept into his long, thin face had a look of triumph about it. But she suppressed it, rebuking herself for taking amiss everything he said. "You think I cannot run," she laughed. "Nor could you, if you had followed my father for a week in Philadelphia. He must needs see everyone—the Governor, Mr. Morris, Mr. Cadwalader. And then he must go to the Assembly and the Ball to remind him of more people to

see on the morrow. La, I was tired."

"You must see them all, too?" he ventured mischievously.

She let the sarcastic thrust go unchallenged. "I heard much of interest. Tell me, Sheldon, what would you do if the colonies went to war against England?"

Her question, dropped so irrelevantly into the conversation startled him. "I don't know," he replied at length with a puzzled frown. "I have never thought of it. Why do you ask? What reason is there for war?"

"There may be good reason before long. Father said so. I wondered what you would do."

"I do not think I could fight against England," he answered briefly.

"Then you would fight against the colonies?"

"I could not do that either. Perhaps I would not fight at all."

They entered the woods and he stooped to pick up a twig, breaking it in small pieces between his strong fingers. She couldn't resist an argument for long, he thought. "I have no quarrel with England," he added firmly, hoping to end the discussion.

"Could it be fear?" she reflected aloud.

He stopped short, turned to face her with blazing fury. Her raised eyebrows, tilted upward like the wings of a bird, and the smile playing like a shadow on her lips, were mocking him! No one could hold his temper in the face of such unreasoning accusation. "I'm not afraid of anything!" His words cut through the stillness of the woods with razor edge. "You are safe in judging others, Evelyn, because you are a woman and know nothing of fighting. While men were dying, you could sip your tea and criticize."

"I do not sip tea!" she rejoined hotly. "We have not had a case of tea in our house since the tax was levied. As for fighting, there are other ways than with a musket."

"I don't imagine that you would try very hard to discover them," he retorted.

His words brought her up sharply. "You know nothing of me. You never will." They stood facing each other, white and tight-lipped. He had an almost uncontrollable desire to shake her till her teeth rattled and wish her to Hades. Then her face began to swim before him. Dress and fichu became a distorted blur and her

topaz brooch danced wildly. He wove to a stump, half-blinded by the pain in his head, and sank down, burying his face in his hands. He was barely conscious that she stopped beside him, shocked and frightened, but when she put her hand on his shoulder he groaned, "Don't touch me, please!"

She stood a little apart and watched him sitting as if he were carved from stone. What had she said, she thought wildly. She had as much as accused him of being a coward. Oh, God, her mind raced on in anguish. Afraid! When there isn't a drop of fear in his blood! What an utter fool I am. No wonder he will not let me touch him!

Suddenly he raised his head and she saw that his face was ashen and his eyes dull with pain, but his broad mouth was stretching in a slow, boyish smile.

"I'm sorry," he said sheepishly. "It's the fall I had. My head wasn't hard enough to take it, and when I get excited—well, it's one way to stop our argument and get sympathy, eh, Evelyn?"

With ineffable relief she knelt on the ground in front of him, unmindful of his embarrassment or her fine green skirt ground into the dirty leaves on the path. "I can still hear the blood pounding in my ears, you frightened me so," she whispered.

He patted her hand reassuringly. "I am all right. It's only for a moment I feel dizzy and sick. The doctor says it will pass."

She bit her lip in perplexity at the strange desire she had suddenly to hold his head close against her and tell him over and over that she had not meant what she said; that she had spoken unthinkingly out of anger because he thought her useless. But he was lifting her to her feet and laughing at her fears.

"I am indestructible, Evelyn. I will always be here to fight with you."

His careless tone sobered her. "Shall we go back, now?" she asked quietly.

SHELDON went to Williamsburg feeling that William and Mary College was going to be a haven of peace after the last few months. He and Clen settled into their rooms in the dormitory, and then

Sheldon began to look around him, to understand what he had been told and had refused to believe. Everywhere there seemed to be mounting tension. All the gaiety was the sugar coating of a bitter pill. At the college, the students were already dividing into strong, uncompromising groups. There were the Royalists, the Whigs and the Moderates, and if they had been politicians they could not have maintained their positions more firmly. What surprised Sheldon most was that many of the sons of Tory families were the most outspoken in their criticism of England. They seemed to attach no importance to political inheritance. And, what was more alarming, they had, at least, specious arguments to support their beliefs.

At first, he had hoped to stay outside all groups. When he questioned himself on his own position, he knew that he was a Royalist. He was forced to admit that there were grounds for grievance over trade restrictions, and the threat of new taxes without representation; it was patently unfair of Governor Dunmore to dissolve the Assembly when the members went too deeply into these grievances, and to prorogue it when he suspected that the object of their meeting was the settlement of differences between the Colony and the Crown. But, on the other hand, the thought of disloyalty to the King, of rebellion, horrified him. Why couldn't the differences be settled as between father and son without bitterness and recriminations and violent haranguing?

He and Clen argued far into the night on the subject. Often Carter Burwell joined the discussion, for he and Clen stood together as Moderates. "Don't you see that while we need the protection of England, we've got to have our rights? England profits by two million pounds a year in trade with us, and yet she clamps these everlasting restrictions on us. We can't trade here, we can't trade there. If this country is bankrupt, England will suffer. She ought to see that." When Carter explained his views to Sheldon, his dark eyes flashed with conviction and there was newfound determination in his jutting chin and sensitive mouth.

"You would favor rebellion?" Sheldon asked.

"We favor a compromise," Clen answered for them both.

Unsure of his beliefs in an atmosphere of positive opinions Sheldon had called on his father's Burgess friend, Peyton Randolph, who lived in the broad white house opposite the powder magazine. He

had come away with a feeling of even greater confusion, for Randolph stated plainly that Lord Dunmore was an unhappy choice for Governor, and that he doubted if he would ever propose a compromise to His Majesty.

The weeks and months passed swiftly, then suddenly the unnatural calm was broken. In Rhode Island, in the early days of 1772, a group of irate merchants burned the preying British revenue schooner, *Gaspée*. Word sped to Williamsburg by courier and was published in the *Gazette*. The division of opinion grew wider. Taverns and coffee-houses rang with dissension. Some cried that it was time Parliament knew the colonists intended to fight for their rights. Others, taking a longer view, feared that such acts might draw Virginia into the growing struggle against the Crown before her grievances could sustain such a course. The war clouds were banking black and restless on the horizon, shadowing sober reasoning. Momentarily cautious, yet subtly scheming to win the argument for taxation, Parliament so far reduced the tax on tea that it sold for less in America than in England. But the Adamses and John Hancock, up in New England, saw through it at once, and their warning reached the southern colonies by every available means. Hancock made no bones about carrying on illicit trade in the face of oppression. His exhortation was to fight fire with fire. On that, he and the Adamses cried out as one, beseeching the colonists not to permit themselves to be duped, degraded as slaves of an avaricious monarchy. By September of 1773, it seemed that the smallest spark would set off the emotional dynamite of the colonies.

In the midst of the excitement, Miss Florrie decided to come to Williamsburg. She wrote Sheldon that she felt the need of a change, that Mrs. Nathaniel Burwell had invited her to The Grove for the week-end of the fox-hunt and that she hoped to see the latest play. But Sheldon had his own suspicion of her visit. More than likely she hoped to persuade him to return to Bellevue with her. She would spin him a yarn about her loneliness, her problems, and elaborate on her implications that his duty left him no other course. But his return was more impossible now than ever; unless he stayed in the Capital to see for himself what was happening how would he ever know where he stood? Evelyn had called him a conservative, as if he followed blindly the Hilliard political tradition.

Of course, she was a Whig, like her father. They were beginning to call themselves patriots and to cry for liberty in bold terms; that, he could not do. Peyton Randolph had said they must try every means for a peaceful settlement. That was only common sense.

He gave Clen the news of Aunt Florrie's impending arrival, teasing him with a smile. Clen was about as fond of Aunt Florrie as she was of him.

5

SHELDON, Clen and Carter rode together the six dusty miles to The Grove. Within the plantation a cedar-shaded lane led to the red brick house on the James. They passed between the kitchen wing and the greathouse and drew up before the semicircular stone steps at the river entrance. In the late afternoon light the James shown like a broad metallic belt beyond the terraced turf, but around the entrance to the house, cool patterned shadows fell from a single line of tulip poplars.

Nathaniel came down the steps to greet them, summoning a boy from the shade of the kitchen wall to take their horses. Sheldon's glance swept his plum-colored velvet coat and satin breeches with envy. There was no doubt that Nathaniel deserved his sartorial reputation and that his tailor earned every guinea he overcharged the wealthy young squire.

"I thought I heard your horses," he said. "Welcome to The Grove. You're just in time for tea."

"Sheldon thinks he'll need something stronger than tea before he faces his aunt," Carter laughed.

"Is she here yet?" Sheldon asked.

Nathaniel nodded. "I didn't know you found her so frightening, Sheldon."

"Not frightening," he said, as they walked into the house, "but quite determined. She thinks I ought to live at Bellevue with her."

"She frightens *me*," Clen admitted.

The great hall was cool with the stirring of autumn, though strong sunlight in broken patterns fell across the polished poplar floors.

"Sukey is resting," Nathaniel said. "She found the heat today

EXT

quite trying." He led them into the drawing-room.

Clen followed in Sheldon's wake, wishing that he had his friend's effortless poise at times like this. The room seemed crowded with guests, though only Lucy and Tom Nelson, Carter Braxton and Miss Florrie sat at the table.

Miss Florrie allowed Sheldon to kiss her cheek but she spoke to him as casually as if they had just parted the day before. Her glance, when it fell on Clen, narrowed.

"Good afternoon, Clenleigh," she said, and he muttered a response, hastening to be out of her sight. On Carter she bestowed one of her rare, warm smiles.

Suddenly the tension seemed to break when the three young men had performed the formality of greeting Miss Florrie. Sheldon bowed over Lucy Nelson's hand, realizing in one swift glance that she was as beautiful as he remembered her to be when she and Tom Nelson had fox-hunted at Shipley three years ago.

Tom Nelson was a lucky man, for Lucy's beauty was not her only charm. Of all the Tidewater ladies, she had first captivated Colonel Washington, who claimed that her wit and grace were an irresistible combination.

"Tom tells me you are at the College now," she said, "and you haven't once come to see us."

"I have had so little time for pleasure, ma'am," he answered, moving reluctantly from her to Tom Nelson and Braxton when he realized that Clen was waiting awkwardly to pay his respects.

"Well," Braxton said, "I was delighted to hear you were coming. I was on the point of tracking you down at the College to see how you were enjoying your new life."

"None of us has seen much of Sheldon," Nathaniel told him.

Miss Florrie's voice cut their conversation. "He has more likely been absorbed by the new crop of Whigs."

Sheldon turned with a start and realized that his aunt's coolness did not imply that she had any intention of dropping their bone of contention in rugged silence.

Braxton said, "Now, Miss Florrie, I think you misjudge him," in the tone of one talking to a child, but her expression stiffened so abruptly at his intrusion that Lucy interrupted,

"Shall I pour tea for your guests, Nathaniel?"

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"Please do," he replied with a grateful smile.

Clen coughed behind his handkerchief and retired to the window sill.

"How brave of you to serve tea, Mrs. Nelson," Miss Florrie commented dryly.

"This is tea from Holland," Lucy explained pleasantly, well aware that Miss Florrie would love to air her Royalist views on the subject, but determined not to give her the opportunity. "Do come sit beside me and tell me the news of Fredericksburg."

What a master of tact she is, Sheldon thought with infinite relief, as the conversation between the two women turned to the latest French fashions, the vogue for beads, and then to the American Company of Comedians that had been such a success at the Williamsburg theater.

The men withdrew with their tea to the other side of the room, standing in the full light of the casement windows overlooking the river. For a moment Braxton studied the room silently, his eyes lingering on the delicately carved cornice, moving downward to the satin sheen of the pine panels.

A slow frown furrowed Nathaniel's high brow. "What will happen to all this if war breaks out, Colonel Braxton? What is going to happen to the whole Colony? There is nothing but unrest these days, as you and Tom know. I fear Lord Dunmore was a very bad choice for Governor."

"A bad choice without doubt," Braxton agreed, "and he surrounds himself with men who are so inimical to the colony that the people are bound not to trust him. Don't you think that is the chief trouble, Tom?" He drew Nelson into the conversation, while Sheldon and Clen, hovering on the fringe of the group, stored up the argument as ammunition to defend their own opinions.

"It's beyond me how he could have chosen Captain Foy for his Secretary. The man has no tact and no judgment. Naturally, the people don't want to be taxed to pay the salary of a man they detest. Unless I'm mistaken, trouble will start in that quarter before long." He turned grave blue eyes on Braxton. "We'll see, sir, what feeling has been stirred when the House assembles this month."

"Unless the Governor prorogues it," Burwell smiled with a grim

twist of his lips.

Braxton nodded soberly. "He will do it once too often. But we have got to keep calm. Randolph and Pendleton are good men to follow—conservative, reasonable thinkers." He wanted to impress his point upon Nelson, for the young man who had been elected a Burgess from York at twenty-one represented the youthful element in the House—the successors to himself and his colleagues. The opinions of Nelson and other young men like him held a serious significance. "Virginia is more fortunate at present than Massachusetts and Rhode Island," he went on. "At least we have had no bloodshed." He drew his fingers across his chin in a reflective gesture. "I believe there is more in the burning of the schooner *Gaspée* than meets the eye. The people of Providence have borne a long grudge against her commander Dudingston, and you can hardly blame them. He's confiscated enough so-called illicit cargo during the last year to ruin the merchants. In fact, there doesn't seem much doubt that some of the most prominent citizens had a hand in the burning of the ship. I, for one, don't put much faith in that tale of her chasing the Providence *Packet*."

"Nor do I," Nathaniel responded sharply. "England is only getting what she deserves, and I am sure you'd feel the same, sir, if you were shipping from Boston."

Braxton's eyes narrowed cautiously. "I agree that she is asking for trouble, but I think there is still opportunity for an amicable settlement of our differences, if only we remain calm. While I sympathize with the Providence merchants, there's no doubt the burning of the *Gaspée* strengthens England's hand."

"Shall we freshen our tea, gentlemen?" Nathaniel moved toward the table. "The conversation interests me. There is a slight divergence of opinion amongst us. You, sir," he addressed Braxton, "are the conservative. I fear I am more radical in my views."

Sheldon and Clen drew chairs up to the sofa. Here were their own arguments, expressed with first-hand knowledge. It would no longer be necessary for Robert Nelson and Carter Burwell to expound their brothers' views. They were voicing them for themselves, holding Clen and Sheldon within the magic ring of their logic.

When the men had settled themselves once more to the argument, Braxton said reflectively, "Only by behaving with dignity

can we lend force to our argument. Violence without good reason will avail us little."

"In that I agree," Nathaniel replied. "But if the Ministry continues to pay as little attention to the complaints of the colonies as it has up to the present, there is no alternative save force. And I, for one, would be willing to fight."

Braxton gave him a searching look. It was young men like Nathaniel to whom Patrick Henry, with his schemes for a colonial militia, was appealing. Young men who took it for granted that the colonies would win a war with England, and who refused to face the probable consequences of defeat; men whose blood was hot and who were unreasonably excited by Henry's flaming denunciations of the Crown. They needed to temper patriotism with caution, for the patriotism of 1773 was closely approaching fanaticism.

Suddenly Nathaniel's face lit up in a genial smile.

"We have talked of politics long enough, sir, and I am afraid I provoked it. What impressions I have, I gather largely from the effects of events upon myself and my family, whereas you and Tom are forced to face all the problems of Virginia with equal integrity." He rose and took Braxton's empty tea cup. "Lucy, if you and Miss Hilliard will excuse us, I want to show Tom and Colonel Braxton the hounds before it grows dark. And the Desmonds will be here at any moment."

"Yes. All of you men, do go outside and cool your heads off," she laughed. "I declare you'll be too weary to hunt tomorrow if you don't stop arguing." As they left the room, her eyes lingered on Sheldon's tall figure. "Your nephew is such a handsome young man. You must be proud of him."

Resentment was only faintly veiled in Miss Florrie's expression. "I had hoped that he would come to live with me after my brother died, but I am afraid Colonel Braxton encouraged him to oppose my wishes."

"Sheldon looks quite capable of making his own decision," Lucy replied quickly. Then she laid her hand soothingly on Miss Florrie's arm. "It's not easy, at best, for us to understand our men, and they have become so restless and excitable in these trying times. Tom paces the house like a caged animal, and if I beg him not to

wear himself out worrying, he tries to conceal it, which is even worse. They're all so afraid they're going to make the wrong move."

"But Sheldon is not a politician," Miss Florrie cried.

"All men are politicians, now, Miss Hilliard. It is their duty to understand what is happening—to take a stand."

"A stand? On what!"

Lucy returned Miss Florrie's challenging gaze with steady eyes, her head bent thoughtfully. "Surely, Miss Hilliard, you must realize that there is much discontent in the Colony—that the Burgesses' patience with the Governor is almost at an end."

"*Their* patience! What of the Governor's patience? His Majesty's patience? I see no reason for discontent if we are loyal, obedient subjects. Sheldon will make a poor servant of the Crown if he continues to listen to seditious talk. He would not be permitted to hear it if he were at Bellevue."

Lucy sighed. It was impossible to reason with a Royalist as blind in her devotion as Miss Hilliard. "I know Suzanna would like to see you," she said after a moment's heavy silence. "She'll think I'm selfish to have kept you here so long."

Miss Florrie rose with alacrity. She knows I am right and she doesn't want to talk about it. Well, neither do I, she told herself firmly as she followed Lucy from the room.

When the men turned back to the house, the sound of a coach and horses' hooves quickened their steps. "That must be Mr. Desmond and Sarah," Nathaniel said, and went ahead to meet them.

"Who are they?" Sheldon inquired of Braxton.

"Christopher Desmond and his niece. I believe she's just arrived from London. He's a pompous old fool, lives in Charlottesville during the winter and Norfolk in the summer. For a farthing, he'll tell you everything you want to know about his great friend, the Governor; he might even go so far as to tell you what the King said to him the last time he attended a levee, though I fear he's worn that one out."

Nelson broke into a loud laugh. "The description is complete, sir. And here he is. By Jove, there's Major Ward, too, Clen."

Clen's face fell. "God's teeth! I knew this would happen." Then as suddenly as it had clouded, his face brightened and he jabbed his forefinger in Sheldon's chest. "That's your Aunt Florrie's fault."

He never gets invited to Bellevue, and, by Gad, he's decided to trap her here."

"Do you think he seriously wants to marry her?" Sheldon's eyes widened in amazement.

Clen chuckled. "He carries on like a schoolboy over her. Says he always sees her as she was when she first came to Bellevue—a sad, beautiful creature. His only wish in life is to make her happy. Why, do you realize that if I hadn't been born under a lucky star, Miss Florrie would be *my* aunt, too! Thank heaven, your father had the foresight to caution Uncle Ben against mentioning marriage."

"I didn't know," Sheldon said, and was glad that the growing darkness covered his confusion.

As Christopher Desmond's coach drew up before the great white door, Major Ward walked his horse toward the three men and dismounted.

"Didn't expect to find you here," he mumbled to Clen, then turned his attention abruptly to Sheldon and Nelson. "I met the Desmonds in Williamsburg, just as I was on my way to the College to see Clenleigh. Glad now I didn't waste my time." He gave an embarrassed cough and stole a glance at Clen. "When they told me they were on their way here, I decided to pay my respects."

"It's our good fortune that you did, sir," Sheldon said, trying to suppress the smile that rose involuntarily to his lips.

"I hope this is not an intrusion." He directed his words to Nelson as he handed the reins to a waiting negro boy.

"Diversion is just what Nathaniel needs," Nelson reassured him. "When he is alone, he worries overmuch about Suzanna."

"There is a large party?"

Sheldon coughed behind his hand, and nudged Clen. "Only my aunt and Colonel Braxton—and us," he answered with a mischievous smile.

However determined Ward had been to assume an air of indifference, his face, in the light that shone from the open door, had a sudden look of contentment, and there was an unfamiliar ring to his voice when he greeted Nathaniel.

"I am delighted Mr. Desmond persuaded you to come," Burwell said, as he stepped aside to allow his guests to pass into the great hall. Lance, the decrepit negro butler who had served Nathaniel's

father, took Sarah's light cape, and closed the door. Clen acknowledged the Desmonds shyly and wished for a drink. Strangers always upset him when he was sober. Sheldon made a deep bow to Sarah Desmond, aware of the gentle, appraising gray eyes that seemed to sweep every feature of his face in a single glance.

"Let us go into the drawing-room," Nathaniel invited. "Lance, send word to Miss Lucy that the guests have arrived, and then bring toddies for us and hot tea for Miss Desmond."

Sheldon watched Sarah as she preceded them into the room. The top of her auburn head must scarcely come to his shoulder. He noticed that the movement of her hips against the folds of her blue silken dress gave to her softly curved figure a sense of uncommon grace. It is the grace of a very young person, he thought, guessing her age at no more than sixteen. Her fresh, smooth skin and candid gaze would not have survived many more years of these troublous times and yet there was provocative maturity in her full breasts.

When, with a question, she drew him to her side on the sofa, he was definitely aware of her voice for the first time. It was an arresting voice, as gentle as the curves of her body. A tone of caressing quality, neither deep nor high-pitched, suggested to him a tolerance disturbingly absent in Evelyn's nature.

"You are staying here?" she asked, and he had an intuitive feeling that his answer was important to her.

"Only for the week-end. I return to college on Monday."

"Oh! William and Mary College?" There was unguarded interest in her question.

He nodded.

"I have always wished to see the college," she hinted without embarrassment. "It must be vastly interesting."

"More now than ever," Sheldon replied seriously. "It's like a pool, reflecting all the conflict—"

She did not let him finish. "You are a Royalist?" She leaned forward, watching his face with wide apprehensive eyes but he couldn't tell what she wished the answer to be.

Just then Lance entered with the tea tray, placing it on the low Queen Anne table before the sofa. Sheldon seized the opportunity to escape Sarah's question, joining Braxton on the other side of the room. "May I have a moment with you, sir?" he asked urgently.

Braxton nodded. "Will you excuse us, Nathaniel, if we go into the library?" When he had closed the door behind them, a slow sigh escaped his lips. "I am weary of political discussions. For Heaven's sake, tell me about Bellevue."

Sheldon sank into a leather armchair beside the fireplace and stretched his long legs. Claspings his hands behind his head, he looked up at Braxton with a troubled frown.

"I am convinced, sir, that Collin is a thief, but Aunt Florrie still refuses to discharge him. I'm afraid he is going to cause her serious trouble before he's through. He'd think nothing of breaking the trading restrictions, if it suited his purpose. According to his accounts, the plantation hardly pays for itself, and you know that's ridiculous."

Braxton's look of amazement did not surprise him. "Hardly paying for itself! Why, it's absurd. He's had time to make her a neat profit—a very neat profit. I don't wonder that you're worried. You say Miss Florrie refuses to discharge him? Why?"

"She says he has a way with the slaves."

"So would a dozen other men. I must speak to her, not that she would relish advice from me. But she must be made to see reason." He paused to take a pinch of snuff from an embossed gold box, then snapped it shut and ran his thumb over the worn surface. "That brings me to the subject I had in mind to discuss with you."

Sheldon drew up apprehensively in his chair and crossed his legs. Shipley, he thought. He's going to talk about my duty again.

"You are still determined not to return to Shipley?" Braxton asked.

"Yes, I am." Sheldon felt a flush of color stain his cheeks.

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence before Braxton went on.

"If you want me to continue managing your affairs at Shipley, I must warn you that hard times are ahead. You will, of course, lose considerable trade, as we all will. You will be far less rich than you are at present. I feel that if you lived at Shipley—"

"My expenses would be greater than they are now," Sheldon countered. "And I cannot be at college and Shipley at the same time."

"Quite true. But when the term is ended—"

"I am going to make one more effort with Aunt Florrie," Sheldon told him emphatically.

"Very well. Perhaps you should."

They heard the sound of footsteps on the staircase. Sheldon looked at his watch. "We haven't long before supper. I reckon we'd better dress." As they walked to the door, he said, "I think I would like to have Lacey at the college. There are many things he could do for me. I don't like trusting Nero to the stable boys."

"I'll send him," Braxton promised. "He will be glad to come. He's a faithful slave, Sheldon. I think he feels he is honoring your father in serving you well."

They went up the stairs together, and paused before the door to Sheldon's room. "We may not be alone again, sir. There's something I wanted to ask you. Have you seen the Bufords?" Sheldon knew that the eagerness in his heart had flown to his eyes, and that his casual tone did not deceive Braxton.

"You mean Evelyn?" Braxton smiled teasingly. Sheldon laughed. "I haven't seen her since that day at Chericoke. I thought I might find her here in Williamsburg one day, but so far, I've had no luck."

Braxton rolled his watch chain in his fingers. His face was serious again and deeply thoughtful. "Eustice and I have never seen eye to eye politically, and we have drifted even farther apart of late. I seldom see him. I fear Evelyn is ripe for his rebellious ideas, Sheldon, and she has the independence of spirit to carry them beyond the point of caution. If you see her, I hope you will try to dissuade her for her own good."

Sheldon shook his head hopelessly. "If she has made up her mind, I will be the last person capable of dissuading her."

6

DINNER was a gay affair. Sheldon found himself seated next to Sarah who challenged even Lucy's beauty in an exquisite gown of white satin. Above the curve of her breasts a square-cut sapphire suspended by a silver chain reflected the restless candlelight.

"That is a very beautiful jewel," Sheldon indicated. When her

fingers went to her throat, he saw that her hand was small and slender and that she wore a sapphire ring matching the stone he had admired.

"My mother gave them to me when I left England," she explained softly. "She said they had always brought her good fortune."

"I hope they will bring good fortune to you, ma'am."

"They have already." She held his glance with eyes whose intensity left little doubt of her emotions. He could never read Evelyn's eyes as he read Sarah's now. Evelyn's, he thought, were incapable of this candor; or else they were so dark, they burned so deeply, that one's senses were confounded by a dozen hidden meanings.

"I am glad," he said. "Then you do not regret your visit to the colonies?"

"On the contrary, I hope that it will be more than a visit." Color rose becomingly to her cheeks.

He must talk about anything to keep the conversation away from himself, he thought quickly. He had narrowly escaped a difficult question this afternoon, one that required more thought to answer boldly.

As if she had read his mind, she said, "I asked you a question this afternoon that you didn't answer."

His raised brows queried her; but before she could repeat her question, Nathaniel, on Sarah's right, spared him the question a second time. "Sheldon hasn't allowed me to address a word to you," he complained.

She turned to her host, leaving Sheldon to the conversation at Lucy's end of the table. When he caught Lucy's eye, she smiled at him and glanced at Sarah, then back again at him. There was a mischievous twinkle in her eye that made him feel uncomfortably hot around his lace cravat. He knew, now, why Sarah had been seated next to him. Lucy had infallible instinct. She had exercised it in seating Ward next to Miss Florrie, but Miss Florrie's resourcefulness was as great as Lucy's. Resolutely, she fastened on Nathaniel, keeping him in conversation until he had turned in desperation to Sarah.

After dinner Lucy beckoned Sheldon to sit beside her. "I declare

Sarah Desmond didn't spend a happy moment after you left the room this afternoon," she teased, whispering the words behind her ivory fan. "She eyed the library door like a cat at a mouse hole."

"You imagine it," Sheldon replied, but his broad mouth was beginning to twist in an unwilling smile.

"She is lovely," Lucy observed.

"One wouldn't notice her in your company, ma'am," he answered, so quickly and earnestly that she dropped her eyes in confusion. He saw that she was blushing when she raised her head.

"How enchantingly you turn my weapons against me," she said. "We will call a truce before you make me forget my age."

He felt abashed, and yet he knew she had not meant him to. Confound it, he was twenty-one and had a right to admire beauty without being reminded of his age.

Lucy sought to make amends with an engaging smile. "I didn't mean to tease you, Sheldon. I'm glad you think me beautiful, and if I were a girl of eighteen, I swear you wouldn't escape me."

He put her hand to his lips, and as he raised his eyes, saw that Sarah was looking at him with puzzled eyes over Braxton's shoulder. Lucy rose from the sofa and straightened the folds of her dress. "I think we will leave you gentlemen to amuse yourselves and pay our respects to Suzanna before it is too late. She has been by herself so long."

"Must you go?" Major Ward asked, crestfallen. He had succeeded, for the first time since his arrival, in completely cornering Miss Florrie.

Clen's sigh of relief was so audible that he forced a heavy cough to cover his breach of manners.

When the ladies had left the room, the men drew their chairs around the crackling fire. Lance set the port within reach and withdrew quietly, shutting the door behind him.

For some reason, Ward did not warm to the talk of crops and prices and illicit trading. His seamed, gaunt face was thoughtful, but it was not thought of politics that occupied his mind. Snapping the cover of his silver snuff-box, he answered briefly the questions put to him about the protection of cargo vessels from continual piracy. Suddenly he said, "I am more interested in the protection of the western frontier."

Sheldon glanced at him with a puzzled frown. It was always hard to realize that Ward had been a fighter of Indians. His sandy hair was so tightly drawn back into its queue, that it gave him the appearance of a medieval scholar. Only in the darting ice-blue eyes was there a sign of cool wariness and a quick, appraising instinct.

"I prefer to see the Colony protected against insidious rebels like Patrick Henry," Desmond cried. "He is more dangerous than the savages."

Ward turned on him sharply. For a moment he studied the heavy pompous figure of the man. "That is not quite the point, Christopher," he replied acidly. "You ought to know the importance of annexing the western frontier, whether you view it from the point of trade or settlement. The colonies are going to expand. They must, whatever the outcome of the present trouble. And they can only expand in one direction—west. What is the Assembly going to do about buying up the land from the Indians?"

"The problem is, where to stop," Braxton told him.

"Stop?" Ward echoed. "Why stop, for the present, where the land is settled, and if the Indians refuse to sell the land, drive them out! They are a constant threat of trouble. Damn my soul if there isn't an uprising soon. I have heard recently that Dunmore's agent, Dr. Conolly, is acting secretly under the Governor's orders to bring on a war."

"A war?" Sheldon's interest quickened.

Ward nodded. "Perhaps there is not a great deal of truth in it, but the Indians are growing restless, and they've been butchering again along the Ohio."

"Could it be possible," Braxton mused, "that the Governor wants the land himself?"

"That is a treasonable remark, sir!" Desmond exclaimed, his color rising to an apoplectic purple.

"My dear Desmond," Braxton said patiently, "it is nothing of the sort, and is probably quite true. A good many of us, including my father-in-law, and Nathaniel, here, applied for land in the west and were summarily refused by the Governor. We suspected then that he had an eye on it himself; didn't we, Nathaniel?"

"We certainly felt he had some personal reason for refusing our application," Nathaniel agreed.

"What you don't realize, Christopher," Ward went on, emphasizing his words with a thrust of his forefinger, "is that the Governor is a selfish, ambitious man. He has never felt Virginia was good enough for him. He wanted the Governorship of New York. We all know that."

Desmond's color abated, but he grunted in protest.

"Will it do any good to buy land from the Indians?" Nelson asked. He was trying to steer the conversation away from politics. "I, myself, have voted with the Assembly to provide funds for the protection of the frontier, so you may know, sir, that I am in sympathy with you. But if the settlers persist in going into the unprotected regions, what can we do to help them?"

Ward turned the question in his mind for a moment, then he said slowly, "Colonization is always hazardous, but in this case we are able to back it up. It is no great distance to the Ohio when one considers that the settlers on these shores were able to cross the Atlantic Ocean. We need a standing army on the frontier; men trained in border warfare, and more officers like Fleming and Lewis. If I were only young enough—if I didn't have this—" He tapped his wooden leg with his finger and his words trailed off.

Sheldon looked at Clen and wondered if the same thought was passing through both their minds. Clen was still poised, alert, on the edge of his chair, wrapped in the idea which the Major's words conveyed. Physically unsuited to activity as he seemed to be, he was as deeply stirred by the picture his uncle had created as Sheldon was. There was no mistaking the gleam in those small, brown eyes, nor the tense immobility of the clasped hands. Clen saw himself as Sheldon did, out there beyond the Allegheny Mountains in the uniform of a ranger, fighting beside men like Fleming or Lewis. Without actually shaping the protest in his mind, Sheldon felt a sudden surge of rebellion against the planter's life, the timid acceptance of events. There was a place where men were needed and he was free to go. The western frontier held a mysteriously magnetic promise.

He felt, suddenly, that he wanted to go outside alone and think. Excusing himself, during a lapse in the conversation, he went quietly from the room and onto the terrace. A full moon had risen high, driving the blackness of night before its flood of white light. He

walked along the soft turf of the terrace in the shadows of the tulip tree, his eyes gazing beyond the front fields to the river.

There was danger beyond the James in the fastnesses of the mountains but there was hope and the future to build; and the men who could do it were few. There were more men to squabble over a tax on tea and trade restrictions and the peccadillos of the Royal Governors than would ever have the courage to challenge the wilderness that could be theirs for the taking. The taking meant timeless courage and strength and endurance and little breath for words. It meant fighting at the same time an unseen enemy and a visibly cruel and ruthless one. The little band of men waging the battle must have felt in the beginning as he did tonight; impelled by a driving urge beyond knowledge or thought, consumed by a single purpose and knowing a single law—survival.

A sound from the doorway, and a sudden stream of golden light through the silver, startled him. At the far end of the terrace he turned and saw the figure of a woman, her face obscured by the upturned collar of a cape, come swiftly down the steps. Was it Lucy or Sarah Desmond? And then he saw that the crown of her head was lighter than the poplar shadows and he cursed to himself. Sarah! How the devil did she know he was here, and what was she doing following him?

When she reached his side, he saw that her breath came quickly, and that her face was flushed with excitement. She must have seen his annoyance, for she drew in her breath sharply and stood poised before him as if she were about to turn and run. "You are angry with me for following you here," she cried, dismayed.

He smiled slowly, feeling ashamed of his impulsive rudeness. "No, really I'm not. I was just—preoccupied."

"But you are! I know it!" Her eyes grew misty and he thought in sudden desperation, My God, she's going to cry now. But as swiftly as she had seemed on the verge of tears, her mouth tightened in a firm line and she returned his startled gaze steadily.

"I was standing at my chamber window and I saw you walking on the terrace," she explained in a voice so soft he had to bend to catch her words. "I wanted to say goodbye to you and I just snatched up my cape and stole downstairs as fast as I could. I was so afraid Uncle Chris and the others would hear me." She lowered

her head and shivered slightly in the cool night air.

"Here, you are cold," Sheldon said. "Let me get you a heavier cloak."

Her fingers closed quickly on his arm. "No! Please don't. Someone might see you."

"But surely it doesn't make any difference. Well, come, then, we will walk—the other way. Down the terrace."

"Yes. I'd like that." They walked in silence for a moment. When she spoke again, it was in the full-throated voice he had first heard, but it held a deeply disturbed note. "Something dreadful must have happened tonight. Uncle Chris came flying upstairs—" She couldn't help smiling at her own phrase. "Hardly flying, as you can imagine, but he made so much noise that we all looked outside Mrs. Burwell's door to see what was happening. When he saw me, he ordered me to my room and told me to have my portmanteau packed at once. He said we were leaving at daybreak—"

"But what on earth could have happened?" Sheldon exclaimed, trying to recall what course the conversation was taking when he had left the room.

"I don't know," she said. "He didn't tell me. He just said that if he didn't fear his leaving at this hour would upset Mrs. Burwell, he wouldn't spend one night under the roof with a pack of rebels."

"Oh," Sheldon said, and a smile slid over his troubled features. "I can imagine, now, what it was."

"Tell me!" she begged.

"Your uncle is a true Royalist, Miss Desmond. He doesn't admit of any wrong on the part of the Governor or Parliament. The others do not feel so convinced of the infallibility of either. I think they may have said so. I heard your uncle take offense because Colonel Braxton said the Governor wanted some of the western territory for himself, and refused a grant for that reason. Something of the sort may have been said again."

"I understand, now." She drew her cape closer about her. "And you—do you feel as the others do?"

She had managed again to ask the same question, in other words, that he had avoided at dinner. But strangely, he did not mind now. His thoughts in the moonlit evening, and the decision that had

come out of them, made his answer clear.

"I feel that all this is so small a part of what we are going to be, that it hardly matters whether one is Royalist or Whig." His eyes followed the river as he spoke, seeing far beyond the bend and the gentle rising of the wooded land. "When the Colony has grown beyond our wildest dreams, it will only matter that those fittest to govern will have won out."

"But surely no one would want to live in the western country with nothing but savages and wild animals!" she exclaimed, horrified at the thought.

"It's no worse than this country was when the first settlers came here," he reminded her.

"But ships came to the harbors, and there was contact with the outside world—"

"So there was at Jamestown, but the settlers were driven out by the Indians."

"Would you go to the western country?" She slowed her pace and faced him in alarm.

"Yes. I am going—as soon as possible."

Her whole body seemed to deflate and a look of defeat robbed her face of all its animation, as her eyes turned to the river. For several minutes she was silent, then she said, abruptly, "Shall we go back, now? I am quite cold."

He took her arm and led her up the sloping terrace. "You're shaking," he said softly. "I shouldn't have let you stay out."

"I am glad I did. Otherwise—"

He waited for her to finish, but she had said no more when they reached the front steps.

"You started to say something," he prompted, feeling as he spoke that it was a mistake to urge her on.

She gave him one swift glance that revealed her heart. "If I hadn't known, I would have hoped to see you again."

Before he could stammer a reply, she was gone through the door he had opened for her, and was running up the broad staircase.

SHELDON was at Bellevue for the holidays as events moved on a swift and alarming tide into the spring of 1774. In Boston, the night before Christmas, the merchants had flung caution to the winds and the King's tea overboard, and the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, fearing complete and open sympathy with the rebels, had appointed a Committee of Correspondence to concert the action of all the colonies.

When the news reached Fredericksburg, Miss Florrie turned a deaf ear to it, warning Sheldon that if he joined in the seditious talk, he would be more welcome at Chericoke than at Bellevue. But he could not resist a final attempt to make her see how Collin fitted dangerously into the picture.

"You say that Mr. Buchanan's agent has complained of your tobacco, Aunt Florrie. Has it occurred to you that Collin is not selling your tobacco to Mr. Buchanan? It's good leaf—you know that. Half your crop would buy the full amount of poor leaf and make Collin a nice profit."

"Impossible!" she cried.

Sheldon shrugged his shoulders. "Unpleasant, but not impossible. Collin is going to bring real trouble to you, Aunt Florrie. The Colony's on edge, whether you like to see it or not, and if he is ever tempted to break the Articles—"

"Articles—bah!" She made a deprecating sound. "You talk as if the colonies were independent. What right have they to say what they will and will not buy from England?"

"They have already said it," he reminded her.

"Collin obeys my orders and he knows how to handle the slaves." She fell back weakly on the old argument and Sheldon wondered, as he had so often, if she feared an uprising of the slaves. Nothing else could account for her stubborn refusal to see through the overseer. He frowned and twirled the button on his yellow waistcoat. For a moment his eyes studied the bright reflection on the silver buckles of his shoes, then rose again to Miss Florrie's obstinately set face. She was too proud to tell him that she was afraid to be alone, for she had never acknowledged fear of anything. Perhaps this was why she stood behind Collin's physical strength and ar-

rogant confidence, and pretended she kept him because he knew how to handle the slaves.

Sheldon could not discuss with her his plans to go west. But when he took them to Major Ward, hoping for encouragement, the old soldier said solemnly, "I wouldn't tell Miss Florrie just yet. She will feel utterly alone in a world she can't understand."

On the long ride back to Williamsburg, Sheldon argued with himself and Clen.

"I suppose I haven't the right to go, but I've got to. It's the only thing I've ever felt certain of."

"It looks like we'll be needed here pretty soon," Clen countered. "Mr. Jefferson and his friends didn't form that Committee of Correspondence for nothing. You read what he said, that it's the only way to unite the thought and actions of the Colonies."

"I know that, Clen." Sheldon rested his hands on the pommel of his saddle. "But look who's with him. The Lees, Patrick Henry, Dabney Carr. Colonel Braxton says they're going to do all in their power to get the Colonies into war with England. The way we feel about that, we're better off in the Illinois country."

"I don't know that they're so far wrong," Clen reflected. "As soon as the Burgesses try to air their grievances, the Governor dissolves the Assembly. It looks to me like he doesn't want things to be settled peacefully. By God, we've got the rights of free men, and one of 'em's to talk."

"The Governor thought it was seditious talk. He explained that in his proclamation. So what other course did he have as the King's representative? You can't expect him to egg the Burgesses on—"

"That's the point, Sheldon," Clen cried, exasperated. "He can't see anything but the King's side. He'll drive us to rebellion before he's through."

"You're going with me, aren't you?" Sheldon asked suddenly, doubtful for the first time of Clen's intentions.

"I'll go if you do. But I'd rather fight the French than the Indians."

"I've heard they're crueller than the Indians."

Clen shuddered. "Well, you heard Uncle Ben say an Indian can split a beechnut with a tomahawk at fifty feet. Think what he'd do to my skull."

Sheldon laughed and rubbed the palm of his hand along Nero's warm, sleek neck. "You're one of the best shots in Virginia, Clen. I wouldn't like to be in your range."

Clen smiled half-heartedly. "I don't suppose an Indian ever is if he sees you first."

"You aren't afraid, are you?" The question, flung suddenly at him, took Clen unaware. He ran his finger under his linen cravat and stared between his mare's brown ears. "No. Not exactly. Anyhow, it wouldn't matter if there was plenty of rum on hand."

They laughed, breaking the tension that had crept into their conversation.

By the middle of May, the news from the north spurred Williamsburg into action. Couriers riding hard from Boston brought word that the port was to be closed to commerce on the first of June in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party, Massachusetts' charter was to be annulled; she was to lose free government and her future fate was to rest with the Ministry. In the meantime, Merchant Prentis had refused to countermand his order for tea from London. One morning, very early, he was roused from his bed to find his shop surrounded by a crowd of angry citizens and most of his stock strewn about the street. Worse would come, they warned him, when he received his tea.

At William and Mary College, Loyalist students were driven further to ground, hiding together like gray Tidewater foxes and making desperate plans to send a delegation to the Governor to ask for redress. Clen and Sheldon were forced to take an open stand, and aligned themselves with the Moderates.

"That won't hold water for long," Carter Burwell warned them at a meeting in his room.

"Neither will the Colony's grievances," Sheldon retorted, "if we give up all efforts for a peaceful settlement this soon. The strength of our position has been in our patience and our willingness to compromise. In any case we need time and training to prepare ourselves. A fine chance we'd stand now against British regulars."

To Clen he said later, in their rooms. "I think it's more important than ever for us to join the Rangers. There's one thing to be said for it. We'll know what we're fighting about."

"There's truth in that," Clen agreed.

When Sheldon received a hastily scribbled note from Braxton telling him that he was at Mr. Randolph's house and would be glad to see him, he flung on his coat, jammed his hat on his head and told Glen to meet him in their rooms at supper time. "I'll find out what the Colonel thinks of our plan," he told him.

Randolph, Pendleton and Braxton were in the library when he arrived. They greeted him warmly, but there was a certain constraint in their manner as he drew up a chair and they sat down again together. A servant brought in a tray with sherry and biscuits and handed them around. When he had left the room, Randolph turned to Sheldon.

"You have often expressed a desire to know at first hand what is happening in the Colony. I thought you might be interested in our discussion." His great bulk settled back and he put the tips of his fingers together.

"I feel honored that you remember, sir," Sheldon replied, feeling that here, at last, he could speak his mind. "The college is becoming a hotbed of radical sentiments, and I don't seem to be able to fit into it. Though I admit most of the grievances are well-founded, I still can't tolerate the thought of rebellion against the King."

"You are right!" Randolph cried. "That is where Patrick Henry has done his greatest harm. He will not allow the public mind to remain calmly judicious. Of course there are evils all around us. But we can accomplish nothing by going off in an emotional explosion. We have got to make a dignified protest, and give the Ministry a chance to come to its senses."

"We were just discussing the payments of our debts to England," Braxton told Sheldon. "Henry, Lee and Mason have had the audacity to suggest that we repudiate them. That, again, is typical of the prevailing policy." He paused and his eyes slid slowly from face to face before he went on bitterly. "I admit I'm vulnerable to attack on my stand because I'm up to my neck in trade, and most of my planting capital is supplied from England. If my ships and crops are tied up in Virginia, I'll be bankrupt. But I still say, wasn't the non-importation agreement enough? Must we go on to defy a universally accepted business principle by refusing to pay our debts?" He brought his fist down on the arm of his chair. "No man can call it anything but deliberate dishonesty. It will mean the end

of what trade remains with England. No one trusts a defaulter, and we are far from self-sufficient. Far from it."

"That is open to debate," Pendleton mused. "Not that I approve the precipitate action endorsed by men like Henry, but I think England needs us more than we need her."

"Where is our capital to come from," Braxton cried, "and our trade? Spain and the West Indies can never support us."

"I was speaking of basic self-sufficiency," Pendleton replied, his thin face thoughtful.

Randolph snorted impatiently. "That argument won't stop George Mason, Patrick Henry or Richard Lee. They are an obstinate triumvirate, and they're determined to see this thing through." He blew out his cheeks in a long sigh. "There's no use denying they've got the public sentiment behind them. I tell you, they will drag us into revolution if they continue to hold the upper hand."

Braxton rose from his chair and moved restlessly to the fireplace. Running his arm along the mantel, he drummed with his fingers on the satin finish of the pine. "It sickens me. What have they to lose? Lee can afford to sit back and see trade go to the devil. Henry has nothing to lose and a great deal to gain since he is pleased to call himself a lawyer. Mason is the only one who puzzles me. He would never ignore his personal debts. Why then, repudiate public ones?"

Randolph's dark eyes flashed and his double chin shook with the emphatic nod of his head. He pounded a fat fist in the palm of his hand. "They'll lead us straight into ruin with their rabble-rousing strategy. The plain fact is we are not prepared to go the lengths they suggest. Where is our militia? Where are our arms? You can't fight England with broomsticks. It's preposterous!" Suddenly his voice was cool and level. "There is enough truth in what Henry proclaims to make him the most dangerous leader of the day."

"There is only one solution," Braxton pronounced with finality. The three men looked at him in unison. "A general Congress of the colonies, and I shall propose it tomorrow."

For a moment Pendleton's thin, grave face was thoughtful. Was the action too defiant? Then the furrows smoothed out of his high forehead and he nodded. It was not a bad idea. Air their grievances together. Send a dignified protest from the united colonies to the

King and hope for a gesture of conciliation. "That is a good suggestion, Carter."

"Excellent!" Randolph agreed. "You remember what the New Hampshire *Gazette* wrote about the Committee of Correspondence."

Braxton nodded.

"What was that, sir?" Sheldon inquired.

"Why, that Heaven itself seemed to have dictated the proposal to the noble Virginians. I think they will say the same of this plan."

"I think it even more important that it should similarly affect the Ministry." Pendleton smiled, then added for Sheldon's benefit, "William Lee wrote from England that the proposal for a Committee of Correspondence struck a greater panic into the Ministers than anything that had taken place since the Stamp Act."

"I know little of politics," Sheldon admitted, "but I envy the men who will have the opportunity to support Colonel Braxton's suggestion."

"You should strive to be among us," Pendleton told him. "There are few enough young men with the gift of calm reasoning."

Braxton looked up quickly, studying Sheldon's tall figure in a new light. There was a steely quality in his lanky body and strength rising out of his hard, wide shoulders. It was a strength upon which great burdens could rest securely. Braxton was seeing him in the House, his reddish-blond head towering like a beacon above men of lesser stature. Sheldon had a face and bearing to command respect. Like his father's, his features were carved with a bold, fearless line.

When Braxton spoke to him his words were impelled by a mounting surge of enthusiasm. "Mr. Pendleton is right, Sheldon. You say that you envy the men in the House who will have the opportunity to support my proposal. Why do you not become one of them? It is not impossible to any young man of intelligence and determination." His expression softened. "It would give me as deep a sense of pride as it would have given your father to see you sitting with the Burgesses."

Sheldon looked from one to another, more profoundly stirred by the confidence that lay behind their suggestion than by the thought of sitting with the Burgesses. If men of more intelligence and ex-

perience than he had failed to settle the Colony's dispute with England, what could he hope to achieve there? In the west, he could give something of value: physical strength and the knowledge of what he was fighting for.

He ran his hands along the arms of his chair. "I have never thought of myself in such close association with what is happening. I know little of politics and I doubt if I could carry my weight in the House even if the honor of trying should be granted me. But I do know something of land and I am strong. Major Ward said they desperately need men in the western country." He paused, searching Braxton's face for approval. "I'm going to offer my services there. I'm going to join the Rangers if Captain Stuart will accept me."

Braxton folded his hands beneath his coat-tails, moved to the window and stood for several moments in silence, looking out over the neatly trimmed garden. Then he came slowly back to the hearth. "You say that you could not carry your weight in the House. Do you realize that there are far fewer obstacles in the way to that achievement than through the wilderness to the Illinois country? I am sure Major Ward would agree that frontier fighting requires more profound knowledge of the enemy and his environment than you would ever be called upon to exercise in the House. Most of the men out there have known the wilderness from childhood. Neither its terrors nor its privations are new to them, and yet you propose to take your fate in your hands and offer yourself to its defense, without a knowledge of fighting or the faintest conception of privation."

Sheldon felt a surge of impatience. "Might not the same be true, sir, of the colonists who first came out here? As Major Ward said, colonization is always hazardous, but it isn't always left to the experienced. As for fighting—" he smiled and shrugged his shoulders—"I might as well learn in a hard school."

"But the very nature of the country is against the pioneer," Braxton went on, relentlessly. A dread of this decision had been in the back of his mind ever since the night Major Ward had spoken so vividly of the need for men on the frontier. He had not missed the significance of Sheldon's intense interest, but he had hoped that the passing weeks would dull the boy's enthusiasm. Evidently they had

only served to stimulate it.

"What precisely is your purpose in joining the Rangers?" Randolph asked.

"I see it as a chance to fight for the Colony, sir, without opposing the King. It is the best that I can conscientiously do."

"We may still be able to stave off any fighting here. Why don't you wait and see?"

Stubborn lines tightened in Sheldon's face. "I did not give you my only reason for deciding to go to the Illinois country. It's obvious that the planters here are going to be crushed to the point of rebellion by debts and taxes and trade restrictions. The only alternative is compromise, which doesn't seem to fit the mood of the Ministry. In the western country there is land for everyone—new land and a cooperative system of trade. All that matters is that you have the courage and strength to hold what you've got."

"It will take courage and strength to hold what we've got here," Braxton retorted.

"Yes. That is true," Sheldon conceded. "But in holding it here you fight the King; on the frontier we will fight a common enemy."

Pendleton nodded and a smile stole over his face. "I understand your dilemma. You are in the transition stage between Tory and Whig."

Sheldon and Braxton walked back toward the college together.

"So you are determined to go," Braxton said regretfully. "I had hoped to dissuade you."

"Yes. Mr. Pendleton was right. And as long as I stand in the middle, seeing the evils of both sides, I had best fight the Indians." He gave a quick laugh.

Braxton did not respond. They went on in silence to the college gates before he said, "Tomorrow I will probably pay you a visit—after the Burgesses meet. If you are going away, we had best discuss your affairs."

A deep flush of embarrassment suffused Sheldon's face. He was passing on his responsibilities as if Braxton did not have a hundred important affairs of his own to attend to. If Braxton would only take some of the Shipley land, some of the crops in payment for his trouble. He would ask him again tomorrow; beg Braxton to

let him set his conscience a little at rest.

When they parted, Sheldon watched Braxton walk with bowed head across Duke of Gloucester Street. Something in his solemn attitude brought to Sheldon's mind the unpleasant possibility that Braxton might think he was passing on, perhaps through fear instead of indecision, a graver responsibility than the management of Shipley. Could that have been what Pendleton meant? But surely they couldn't think he was afraid when he was willing to fight in the western country. And perhaps, out there, distance and time might give him a truer perspective, help him to bring order out of his chaotic thoughts and when he came back, it would be with full knowledge of his stand.

8

ON MAY 25th, the Burgesses passed resolutions of sympathy with Massachusetts over the Boston Port Bill and appointed June 1st, the day the bill went into operation, as a day of fasting. Lord Dunmore's rage, as he dissolved the Assembly, was drowned in the crescendo of protests that rose to the lofty ceiling of the House. In as little time as it took the Governor to make his decision, all eighty-nine of the Burgesses were filing over to the Raleigh Tavern. On the fringe of the crowd, pressing close for news, Sheldon stood searching for Braxton. Suddenly he saw the familiar, stocky figure, flanked by Pendleton and Tom Nelson, and he began to edge his way to their side. They had almost reached the tavern door before he had come up to them, but when Braxton caught sight of Sheldon's towering head he motioned him into the entrance hall.

"The Governor's done it again!" He smiled at the question in Sheldon's eyes. "But we are reassembling here, as you can see. Wait for me." Then he swept on in the wake of the Burgesses and the doors of the Apollo Room closed behind him.

Seldom had such indignation rung within the walls of the long room. Braxton looked from one tense, determined face to another, thinking how often he had seen these same faces in this room. But then they had been carefree and smiling, laughter had filled the ballroom and the gaily papered walls had reflected the intimate

glow of a crackling fire. Now, tension hung like a pall over the room and the Burgesses took their seats, their excited conversation dying down before the Speaker's voice.

The deliberations that had been interrupted by the dissolution of the Assembly continued, but on an even stronger and more vibrant note. Patrick Henry's face was granite-like and his shrewd blue eyes, usually so alert, were deep in some vision of their own. This was the opportunity Braxton had been waiting for. Slowly, confident of the support of his friends, he rose to his feet. His shoulders straightened from their slight stoop. He brought his head erect above the curious, attentive Burgesses.

"Mr. Speaker, I have the honor to propose a Congress of all the colonies for the purpose of determining our statements of grievances and claims of redress." Before he sat down his eyes fell momentarily on Richard Henry Lee, then traveled resolutely around the room. In every face he saw approval before the surging chorus of "Ayes." Henry was no longer submerged in his own thoughts, but had turned to George Mason and was talking excitedly. To think I should ever stir him to action, Braxton thought grimly as he sank back in his chair.

The motion was quickly seconded. Further proposals were made to speed up the meeting of the Congress. The Committee of Safety of Virginia was instructed to propose to the Committees of the other colonies the appointment of deputies to meet in Congress.

"Pray God that is not the end of peace," Pendleton murmured at Braxton's side.

Sheldon was waiting at the door of the parlor when the Burgesses adjourned. He wondered if Braxton had proposed the general Congress as he had said he would, and sought for his answer in the solemn faces of the men coming through the tap-room and the hall in a steady stream. The conversation he heard on every hand answered his question before he could make his way to the Colonel's side.

"Good work, sir," he cried, feeling a lump of pride rise in his throat. This would be a day to remember.

Braxton took his arm. "For once, I had every Burgess on my side. But, of course, it was the only solution." The anxious lines that Sheldon had noticed in his face before the meeting were gone

and the sigh he gave seemed to come from deep relief. "Now, I think I'd like to go to your rooms and have a tankard of ale."

"At once," Sheldon cried delightedly. "I'll send Lacey for a barrel of ale, sir."

When they climbed the old dormitory staircase to Sheldon's and Clen's rooms, Braxton felt a sharp stab of nostalgia. There, on the opposite side of the staircase, was the room where he had spent many happy years when he was a young, ambitious student. In those days, his most serious thoughts had been of horses and hunting and gaiety, and now, beneath the light-heartedness of this moment, he felt a persistent, vague fear. Of what? That was the trouble. Perhaps he hoped too violently for peace; perhaps he ought to be more resigned to whatever was coming instead of waging this consuming battle against the inevitable fate of the country.

Clen was reading before the fire when they came in. At sight of Braxton, he lifted himself heavily from his chair and set down a mug of ale on the small table beside him.

"Ale! That's just what we want. Send Lacey for more, will you Clen, while I stir up this fire?" Sheldon said.

But Clen stood where he was, a dozen questions on his lips. "Colonel Braxton, this is an honor, sir. When I saw the crowd on Duke of Gloucester Street and heard what was happening, I hoped we might see you here later on. I can't tell you how glad I am you came. Here, take this seat. It's more comfortable than the others." He turned apologetically to Sheldon. "I've already taken the liberty of sending Lacey for ale—a good quantity of it against this very good fortune."

Sheldon eyed him suspiciously. This garrulous mood was not characteristic of the sober Clen. "And you have already consumed most of it. Are you sure there is enough left for us?"

Clen laughed self-consciously. "Yes. Both pitchers there are full."

"I haven't seen you for a long time, Clen," Braxton said, settling down into the deep leather armchair. "Have you been leading a gay and riotous life?"

"More so than my friend here." Clen winked broadly and nodded at Sheldon who was laying a fresh log across the andirons. "He's gotten too serious for me, lately. I stay out of his way as much as possible."

"And in the way of that barmaid at the King's Arms," Sheldon retorted. "I don't approve of his taste, sir."

Braxton frowned in mock reproof. "You'd better not let the Major hear of it."

Clen chuckled. "He's a bit more lenient with me now since I told him I am going to join the Rangers with Sheldon. I reckon maybe he thinks I might not come back. What do you think of our plan, sir?"

Braxton rubbed his temples with the tips of his fingers. "I can't say that I altogether approve of it. I am afraid it is a foolhardy venture for two young men with as little knowledge of fighting and pioneering as you and Sheldon have. I am trying to think of all possibilities. If you should lose your way, or become ill—the distances are long between the settlements."

Sheldon was standing at the fireplace, his flat back pressed against the mantel. The thumb of one hand was thrust in the pocket of his green broadcloth waistcoat. Suddenly his fingers began to drum nervously. He was remembering his parting with Braxton the day before and the suspicion that had occurred to him then.

"Do you think, sir, that I am running away because I am afraid?" he asked slowly.

Braxton looked into his eyes, trying to fathom the question. "Afraid of what, Sheldon?"

"Of indecision—of being forced to fight here on one side or on the other."

Braxton shook his head, dropping his eyes to the flickering light of the fire. "No. I hadn't thought of that. Have you such a fear?"

"No. It isn't fear. It's confusion—desperate confusion. A chance to fight for a cause I understand is a godsend. None of the dangers you speak of has any importance beside that chance."

Braxton did not answer at once. He gazed into the fire, stretching his thick-set legs out before him. Presently he spoke and there was resignation in his tone. "Then you are right to go. And you will want me to continue to act as your agent?"

"I would be most grateful to you, sir. But you can do me a further service. Allow me to salve my conscience by paying you in land and crops.

"Nonsense!" Braxton grumbled. "If it will make you any happier

I will take what expense it puts me to in tobacco, but I assure you that is trifling. I am more interested in the ale you promised me."

Clen flushed with embarrassment and jumped from his chair. "I plumb forgot it, sir. I was thinking of what you were saying." He filled a pewter tankard and handed it to Braxton.

"I wouldn't recommend our rooms for hospitality," Sheldon laughed, pouring out a tankard for himself.

Braxton took a deep draught of the ale and ran his tongue over his lips. "I have been to Shipley since I last saw you, Sheldon. I was in Richmond attending to some affairs of my own and thought I'd take the opportunity to see how Bacon was managing. He's done admirably. Most of the runaway slaves returned, and he decided to keep them because he thought they'd had their lesson. But he's working the very devil out of them. You're going to have a big tobacco and wheat crop and he's bought fifty more head of sheep."

"That's splendid," Sheldon said. "Aunt Florrie will be glad to hear that she can continue to have her little luxuries in spite of Collin."

Suddenly Braxton's expression, always animated by talk of land and crops, became grave and a question sprang into his eyes. He seemed to debate it for a moment before he asked aloud, "You don't want to see it yourself, before you leave?"

Sheldon raised his head in swift alarm at the haunting fears the suggestion was still able to arouse. "Not yet—when I come back—"

PART III
THE MOULD

ONE hot, sultry afternoon in mid-August, Sheldon rode over to Piper's Landing from Bellevue to see Major Ward. In his pocket he carried the latest edition of the *Virginia Gazette*. Purdie had proclaimed the very news that Sheldon had known, during the last few weeks, would be his only justifiable excuse for leaving Miss Florrie. Ever since his return from college at the end of the term in June she had been sick, and unlike herself, had given in to the care of Dr. McDonald. He had wondered, through the long, anxious days when it had seemed that nothing would improve her condition, whether she had sensed, in his restlessness, the plan that would take him away from her. But if she did, she had given no sign of it, and gradually, as the days had crept on to July, a little color had returned to her face and she had begun to appear for short periods downstairs. Sheldon had known that it would be some time before he could safely break the news of his plans to her, but the time had finally come. She was strong enough to demand Collin's accounts and to study them as carefully as if she really were able to understand them. It amused him, though he concealed his amusement well, to see her bow to his judgment even to this small extent. She had never once suggested that he study the accounts and he wondered if she thought to put Collin on his guard by her irregular inspection.

He had been on the point of divulging his plans when he saw the *Virginia Gazette*. Then the urgency of the news had sent him to Major Ward. He found the old soldier walking back from the landing where he had been inspecting the loading of tobacco, his wooden leg tapping the loose planks of the dock.

Sheldon dismounted, looped the reins over his arm and walked to the head of the dock. He greeted Ward briefly, then drew the paper from his pocket. "Have you seen the latest *Gazette*, sir?"

Ward shook his head. "The news sickens me so, I allow myself the luxury of not reading it. But go ahead, tell me what it says

before Clenleigh starts quoting wildly."

Sheldon unfolded the paper and began reading as they walked back toward the house. "This is what it says: 'Wednesday evening last an express arrived in this city who reports that many families have very lately been barbarously murdered on the frontiers of Pennsylvania, and that His Excellency, Lord Dunmore, is endeavoring all in his power to repel those hostile and inhuman savages. Colonel Preston and General Andrew Lewis, it seems, have raised a thousand men each, and it is reported also that a like number have enlisted under His Lordship's banner, he, as well as they, being greatly exasperated at the late cruel and intolerable treatment of the Indians towards the white people residing in or at the back parts of this Colony.'"

He looked up from the paper. "That is a cause I can understand, sir. I'm going to join them. I hope Clen will, too."

Ward rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "I think you will find your cause a little more confusing than you expect. But it will do you no harm. As for Clen, I doubt if understanding a cause would seriously concern him."

Sheldon turned his horse over to an ambling negro boy and followed Major Ward into the cool expanse of the house. Clen was coming down the stairs, his eyes sleep-swollen. He avoided his uncle's withering glance, but he couldn't escape the grunting reproach.

"There's a fine subject for your proposed adventure, Sheldon—a man who can't be shaken out of his bed till midday." His voice took on a commanding tone. "Come into the library, Clenleigh. Sheldon has news for you."

Clen seemed to shake himself into activity, hurrying down the last few steps. "What's happened, now?"

Sheldon handed him the *Gazette*, watching his face as he read. What Clen saw there seemed to puzzle him. His eyes were fixed on the paper as if a scene were playing to their inner vision and the protagonists were Fear and Death. He returned the paper to Sheldon without comment.

"Well?" Sheldon asked.

For a moment Clen picked at his waistcoat buttons without answering. Presently, he said, "Looks to be more than the usual raid-

ing parties."

"A good deal more!" Sheldon scorned. "Are you going with me or not?"

"I wonder if a couple of raw recruits would be very welcome out there. I reckon what they need are trained men."

"Trained men! Where do you think they'll find enough? Can't you read what it says? There's nothing about trained men in there."

Major Ward snorted impatiently, taking up his place stiffly before the fireplace in the dim library. "If you are afraid, say so, Clenleigh!"

"Of course I'm not," Clen protested, indignantly. "Why we've talked about this for weeks. I was just—surprised that it came like this."

Ward grunted. "If I were younger— Well, I'm not, and there's no use for soldiers with wooden legs." He turned to Sheldon, and his glance softened. "I'll give you a letter to Colonel Fleming, Sheldon. A fine man to serve under."

"Is it a very long way, sir?"

Ward nodded. "Long and arduous. Do you know their rendez-vous?"

"No. But Colonel Fleming commands the Botetourt Regiment. I suppose it's Belmont."

"When will you leave?"

Sheldon turned to Clen, eyeing him meaningly. "Tomorrow at sunup."

"What about Miss Florrie?"

For the first time, a look of gloom settled on Sheldon's face. "I don't suppose one time is any worse to her than another, if I'm going. You'll look after her, sir?"

Ward smiled warmly. "Nothing would pleasure me more, Sheldon. It's a responsibility I should like for the rest of my life. I will do what I can, you know that."

He walked slowly to the escritoire and sat down, taking up a quill pen from its circular bed of shot. He paused for a moment, holding the quill in mid-air, then he wrote, "Colonel—Fleming, Esq.—" The words blurred slightly before his eyes. Time slid back across the years to a July day, an Indian ambush and the searing pain of hot barbs. Unconsciously, his hand dropped to his knee, fol-

lowed the broadcloth breeches down to the rounded end of scarred flesh. His fingers played along the contracted ridges. Then he raised his hand and continued to write.

2

THE general rendezvous was on the Big Levels about seven miles from White Sulphur Springs, but Sheldon and Clen rode out for Colonel Charles Lewis's headquarters at Staunton. In Charlottesville, they heard that General Andrew Lewis, the Colonel's brother, had ordered his regiment to be in readiness to march to the Ohio on the 30th of August, and there was little time to be lost trying to make contact with Colonel Charles Lewis who had certainly left Belmont well behind him by now.

Just before sundown, on the second day of their journey, they crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains through Rockfish Gap. After traveling nearly a mile through dense woods, they came out suddenly at the top of the pass. Drawing rein, they stared ahead in incredulous delight. Before them stretched the valley of the Shenandoah, thick with laurel, oak, the dark, somber hemlock and, in sudden flashes of color, crimson sumac. At the foot of the mountains, a shining tendril of the Shenandoah River curled through the last deepening glow of the setting sun.

Speechlessly, they rode down into the valley. Beyond them, about fifty miles distant, rose the dark purple wall of the Allegheny Mountains. Sheldon kept his eyes on the solid, mysterious barrier until it was lost in the heavy shades of evening. His pulse quickened at the thought that through those mountain fastnesses, shut off to his view now, he and Clen would march for days on the expedition to the West. It was the first time he had ever realized the bewildering vastness of the country beyond the Blue Ridge; or the fact that there was such beauty as this beyond the Virginia that he knew. All of his senses upsurged toward the wonder of the new land. Here was a place for living and expansion, and clear, straight thinking. A land without confusion.

CAPTAIN ALEXANDER MCCLENNAHAN stretched out his long legs and tilted back in his cane-bottomed chair.

"So you want to join Colonel Fleming's regiment?" He threw the question at Sheldon with a half-humorous inflection of his voice, at the same time studying him and Clen with a narrowed, searching glance. What he saw caused him to scratch his head reflectively, and let his eyes go on with their measured scrutiny until Sheldon replied, "Yes, sir. We have a letter to him from Major Ward."

McClennahan's expression grew faintly mocking. "Well, that's fine, now. Have you had any experience in frontier fighting?"

Sheldon looked uncomfortably around Sampson Mathew's Ordinary. He was glad that the men in the room—some in hunting clothes, some in regular uniform and one or two in broadcloth breeches, embroidered waistcoats and long, full-skirted coats—were far too engrossed in their singing and carousing to pay any attention to him and Clen.

"No, sir," he said. "We've had none. But we're good shots. Especially Montague, here."

McClennahan picked up a tankard of ale from the floor beside him and smiled as he put it to his lips. Sheldon shifted his weight and cleared his throat. Then he followed the Captain's eyes to Clen. It was certainly true that at the moment Clen looked nervous, and the tight brown homespun coat into which he had managed to get himself for the occasion accentuated the flabbiness of his figure. "You won't find a better shot than Montague, anywhere," Sheldon added, feeling his skin grow hot at the Captain's amused inspection of his friend.

"Colonel Fleming's regiment has already left for Camp Union. Captain Stuart's company arrives there tomorrow. So it looks like you're too late."

"Can't we march with you to Camp Union, sir?" Sheldon asked. "I am sure we could make ourselves useful. We've got good horses."

McClennahan sprang so suddenly to his feet, that Sheldon stepped back, drawing himself up until he towered over the rangy captain. "We need good horses." McClennahan swallowed the last of his ale in one gulp and wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his buckskin coat.

"You can come along." He poked his finger at Sheldon's broadcloth coat. "But not in those clothes."

Sheldon laughed. "We didn't propose to go like this. We didn't have much time to get suitable clothes."

McClennahan, feeling that he had weakened against his better judgment, exploded. "And you want to fight the Indians! Pray tell me, do you know what you are asking for? Fighting Indians is an art, and damme, I can't say I want your scalps on my head."

Sheldon's teeth flashed white and hard in a sure grin. "We'd rather keep them on our own heads, too, sir."

"I hope you can." McClennahan swept his strong figure with a look of grudging respect. "Report here at daybreak."

Something like a kindly expression came into his small, sharp eyes. "I'll give you the best advice I can."

Feeling themselves dismissed, Sheldon and Clen went up the narrow staircase to their room. On the upper landing they turned and looked down at Captain McClennahan. He was walking from the tavern with the quick, smooth movement of a cat.

4

SHELDON threw himself down beside Clen on the leafy ground at Camp Union and gave way to the aching in every limb and muscle of his body. "Looks like McClennahan meant what he said."

"You mean to harden us?" Clen lifted his head from the hollow of his arms.

"Harden us or kill us."

Clen groaned softly and lowered his head again. In a moment Sheldon heard his muffled snoring. He wanted to sleep himself, but he was even more anxious to study quietly the men around him. They all wore stubby growths of beard and their faces beneath fur caps or brimmed felt hats were grimy with dirt and sweat. Their buckskin hunting shirts were as scarred and dirty as their faces and they carried tomahawks and butcher knives. Some of them sang; most of them talked and laughed in loud, ringing voices. Around the camp, the neighing of horses, the lowing of cattle, the rattle of drums and the sharp whistle of the fife broke the solitude

of the Allegheny wilderness.

Sheldon could understand their good humor easily enough. If he were not so new to it, he would be laughing and singing, too, and listening to their stories with hungry ears. But there was something in their faces and their bodies that set them apart from him and Glen. The raucous good humor of their voices would suddenly, at a sound his ears had not caught, tighten and sharpen. Then silence would fall by tacit consent. One from a group would get up with a single soundless movement and slip into the woods with the soft tread of a wild animal. Presently he would be back, taking up the laughing and the bantering where he had left off.

They knew this country and its signs like Sheldon knew the Tidewater. One thought comforted him. He'd get his experience with men who knew what they were doing.

Early the next morning he rose stiffly from the ground and took the letter to Colonel Fleming from inside his hunting shirt. He'd best present it now, he thought, before the wild activity of the awakening camp put the Colonel in a sour humor. He walked softly among the sleeping men to Fleming's tent.

"I have a letter to present to Colonel Fleming," he said to the subaltern standing guard before the open flap of the tent.

The subaltern turned and walked into the tent. Sheldon could see Fleming seated at a rough log table on which a map was spread. His head rested on the hand that shielded his eyes. When the subaltern stood before him he looked up and lowered his hand to the table. Sheldon saw him nod, and in a moment he was facing the man who, Major Ward claimed, was the finest Indian fighter in the West.

"Yes?" Fleming demanded, but there was nothing sharp or irritable in his voice. If he had all the qualities Major Ward had spoken of, the crafty brain and uncompromising determination, they were not, at this moment, particularly clear in his face. For it had a warmer quality than Sheldon had thought there could be in the expression of such a man. It was hard for him to realize that Fleming, whose eyes seemed gentle with the comprehension of the philosopher, was a veteran of the French and Indian War. But a narrow shaft of sunlight, falling through the tent opening, shone on the smooth scar across the bridge of his nose and he remembered the glancing blow of the tomahawk in the story Ward told of the battle

of the Monongahela.

The quick glance in which Sheldon saw and felt these things brought a slight smile to Fleming's lips, for it was an admiring one.

"I have a letter from Major Ward to present to you, sir," Sheldon held out the soiled envelope with a murmured apology. "The letter was written for Major Ward's nephew, Clen Montague, too. We joined up together."

Fleming read the letter with apparent interest. "You are in McClennahan's company?"

"Yes, sir."

"Major Ward suggests that you serve under Captain Stuart." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I see he has not lost touch with our ablest men. I hope you will have the sense to absorb some of Stuart's knowledge of frontier fighting."

"I think Major Ward has the same hope, sir," Sheldon smiled.

"Undoubtedly," Fleming nodded. "Well, report to him today."

Sheldon turned to leave, but Fleming called him back. "I think Major Ward would give you the same advice that I do. Talk to the older men, listen to what they say and never forget a single detail."

Sheldon walked back slowly through the camp. Everywhere around him men were getting to their feet, rubbing the sleep from their eyes. Already, hot embers had been fed and stirred into flames and the odor of bacon, corn pone and game drew the men toward the camp fires. Alertness was in their light steps, their agile bodies, their sudden, quick-turning glances. They had taken possession of the day.

Sheldon flung himself down beside Clen who still lay flat on his back, hands locked behind his head. He opened his eyes at Sheldon's rough prodding.

"I've got great news for you, Clen!"

Clen looked at him out of the corner of his eye. "Like having to walk all the way to the Illinois?"

Sheldon laughed. "You can't expect privates to ride like officers. But this, I think, comes in the same category."

Clen groaned and sat up. "Well, what is it?"

"I presented our letter to Colonel Fleming."

"And he won't have us?" Clen's face brightened.

"Oh, no. He'll have us. He seems to have great respect for your

uncle. And since your uncle suggested that we serve under his old friend Captain Stuart, the Colonel has ordered us to report to him today."

Clen sighed dismally. "Then let's get it over with. I'm hungry."

The long day drew into chilly evening. Sheldon and Clen gathered with some of Stuart's veterans around the pine-scented camp fire, talking and laughing while they oiled their rifles. Clen couldn't get the Captain off his mind. "He seemed glad to have us in his company," he kept repeating to Sheldon.

"Reckon he thinks you showed the proper spirit in joining up," Sheldon figured with a quiet chuckle.

"What's that?" A soldier in grease-stained hunting shirt and knitted wool cap, with a wide scar that drew down the features on the right side of his face, cocked his head inquiringly at Sheldon.

"My friend here is surprised that Captain Stuart didn't bite his head off," Sheldon explained.

"He gets good-natured like that when we're goin' into trouble," the soldier said. "I'd rather see him sore-headed as a she-bear." He spat a long stream into the fire.

"Careful, Will! You'll put it out," someone yelled, and they all laughed, their spirits as warm as the fire glow on their faces.

"Have all of you fought before in the Illinois country?" Sheldon asked Will.

"Aaron Taylor, over there, he was with Washington at Fort Necessity; Brad Stevens, next to your friend, fought with Braddock at Monongahela; Bob Carter was with Boquet in the Ohio. Reckon we've all had our share. Me? Well, I know Indians pretty well—as well as most, anyhow," Will asserted, and at a lull in the talk, the circle of faces turned toward him, watching while he bit off a hunk of nigger heel and lodged it in his cheek. "I only got one rule," he went on. "The trees is either friends or enemies. Never go by 'em unheedin'. It's surprisin' what a tree can hide."

The men nodded. Then Aaron Taylor said, "The Indians ain't always so smart." He began to smile. "Those red bastards 'll fall for a good trick. I remember once we stood behind trees holdin' out our hats till the Indians fired. Then we'd drop 'em and when those crazy devils came a-runnin' up thinkin' to scalp us, we'd shoot 'em down like ninepins." He laughed with the men at his own

picture. Sheldon and Clen exchanged a quick glance, forcing slow smiles to cover the involuntary tensing of their nerves. Then Sheldon let his eyes slide around the circle of faces, coppery red in the firelight. There was no apprehension, only amusement in them. But perhaps, behind the jovial unconcern, a fragment of fear had awakened unpleasant memories which, but for the fatalism of such men as these, would have shone in narrowed eyes and tight lips.

One of the men slipped from the circle. When he returned he was carrying a bottle of rum, from which obviously he had already drunk a generous portion, for the color flamed high in his cheeks, and as he passed it round, his voice lifted shakily in a mournful song of the Border Rangers. When the bottle reached Clen, he kept it to his mouth till Brad Stevens jerked it out of his hands.

Will gave a deep belly laugh. He knew what ailed Clen, and it egged him on. "Down near the forks of the Delaware during the French War, Jim Thorpe and me saw the Indians take a row of prisoners who'd tried to escape and dig a hole for each of 'em. Then they tied their arms to their bodies and buried 'em in the holes up to their necks and scalped 'em. Pretty soon they built fires around their heads, and—well—Jim, he went out cold and I had to look to it to see we didn't get found. We was hidin' in some bushes, and we must've stayed there four or five hours before they moved on. Crazy, they were, dancin' an' hollerin' like to turn your blood to water."

As the rum got lower, the stories grew wilder. Clen lay down close to the fire and was soon asleep. One by one, the men left the circle. Sheldon lay down on his blanket beside Clen, but he couldn't sleep. His mind spun like a top from one gruesome story to another. He realized now that there were many things he wanted to know before he died. As he lay looking up at the star-peppered sky, broken into fragments by the leafy boughs overhead, he couldn't help thinking of them. He wished that he had made love to Evelyn that day she had come down the dock to him. There, on the forest carpet in Chericoke woods, he could have taken her. The full, bold truth had been in her eyes, and he had chosen, instead, to quarrel with her. It served him right that the thought of her, now, kindled the hopeless, hot surging of his blood. He could almost feel her in his arms, catch the faint scent of jessamine, respond to the soft

pressure of her thighs. He turned miserably onto his face and tried to sleep, but the sky was putty-gray before he fell into a fitful doze.

5

ON TUESDAY, September sixth, the general movement of the camp began. The Virginians, rising sleepily in the misty morning, were hurried to their jobs by brusque, impatient orders. Laggards were prodded into action by well-aimed rifle butts, then detailed to the strenuous work of corralling the cattle for Willie McClure, Chief Driver of Cattle. Jim Hughes, the Pack-horse Master, kept the sweat streaming from the faces of his detail, alternately cursing and loading until the train stood ready.

The camp was a pattern of swiftly moving color: yellow, brown, white and red fringed hunting shirts on bodies that bent to orders, gathering supplies and breaking camp before Lord Dunmore changed his mind again. The men knew now why orders had come so suddenly to end their long days of calm routine and rest. Sergeant Myerdon had heard Colonel Lewis raging in his tent when the message had come from the Governor to join him at the Little Kanawha, a good two days' march beyond their expected meeting place. "It's too late to redirect the route! I won't have my orders confused by—by His Lordship's stupidity. To the Little Kanawha indeed! We will go on to the Great Kanawha, and wait for further orders there. Inform Captain Arbuckle."

"It would be fatal, sir, if the Governor did not join us," Captain Stuart had hazarded.

"Fatal? Perhaps."

Meyerdon had slipped away then, having heard enough to regale the men in his company, and the word had sped through the camp, swiftly as the rustling wind.

Sheldon heard it from the lanky Augusta man, Will McKee.

"Dunmore isn't goin' to meet us. I'd bet the shirt right offen my back on that," he said dispassionately.

"But we need those men. Arbuckle says if the tribes unite against us, we can't possibly stand," Sheldon cried. "The Governor must know that."

Will shrugged his shoulders and twisted his face into a wry grin. "No good countin' on the Governor. Reckon he's the one stirred this all up. Ask Arbuckle. He'll tell you about that."

"Arbuckle's only the guide. Why would he say a thing like that about the Governor?" Sheldon felt an involuntary surge of protest against this disloyalty. He didn't like it. That was why he was here.

"I said it, didn't I?" Will retorted. "An' I don't claim to be disloyal. It's a plain fact. Why, the Governor's agent, Conolly, 's been trying to stir up a war for more'n a year."

Sheldon turned back to his work, strapping the last pack onto the straining burden of a pack-horse. He couldn't believe what this man had said. He was talking like the rebels in the East.

Finally the air was split by the shrill call of fifes and the beat of drums. Carved shot bags and powder horns were securely adjusted to broad, ornamented belts; soft brown hats and fur caps were jerked down on perspiring heads; coarse woolen leggings, reaching half way up to muscled thighs, were loosened for comfort. Then the moccasined feet of the men and their eager, rising voices echoed through the camp as they formed in marching order—Captain Stuart's company of Greenbrier Valley men, Captain John Dickinson's company from the valleys of the Cowpasture and Jackson rivers, Captain McClennahan's and Captain George Mathew's companies from Staunton, the Augusta regiment of Colonel Charles Lewis—all ready to march through the Alleghenies one hundred and three miles to the mouth of the Elk River on the Great Kanawha. Followed by their drove of cattle and their cavalcade of pack-horses, the combined regiments passed over the hill west of Camp Union and disappeared into the wilderness.

The route lay through a trackless forest, the whole way a maze of heavy growth except to the Chief Guide, Captain Arbuckle and his assistant, Jacob Persinger. To right and left of the line the Chief Indian Spy, Frederick Burley, ranged like a hunting dog, turning up unexpectedly to report, then off again for long, suspicion-filled hours.

Sheldon and Clen marched side by side, at first aware of everything: the sighing of pines, the resolute tread of booted and moccasined feet. Even as afternoon wore to a close, the contagious

weariness of men familiar with their surroundings could not blind them to the beauty of their way. Only when the half-dark world reduced all color to a uniform mass and the line was forced to grope its way did fatigue settle down upon them with a heavy, constricting hand. Presently, with a spreading brightness, the moon came up. Aware now only of themselves and their weariness, they plodded along, silent among silent men. All marched to the rhythm of shallow, labored breathing.

"I'll wager the Indians are following us now by a better route," Will grunted at Sheldon's side when the moon rose high. He turned to look back over the straggling ranks. "They could pick us off, one by one, if they'd a mind to." Sheldon looked at Clen, smiled and nodded. Clen seemed to be walking in his sleep. He had not heard.

6

IT WAS a fortnight before they left behind them the rocky masses of the mountain summit, and descended to the valley of the Elk River. Pawpaw, leatherwood and buffalo grass marked their entrance into the river country. The men's eyes, dark with fatigue, strained through the thin morning light to catch sight of their resting place. With one accord, their weary bodies pressed forward, down, down to the green, welcoming valley. Already aching limbs could feel the soft pressure of the earth, and parched faces and burning feet the cool flow of water. It didn't matter what the next day brought. Today they would rest.

On the twenty-second of September, an afternoon of merciless heat, the force on the Elk River was swelled by the troops of General Andrew Lewis with Fleming's Botetourt regiment, the Fincastle companies and Buford's riflemen. The first arrivals knew the strain that lurked behind the newcomers' eyes, and the infinite relief that hastened their last steps. Work ceased momentarily, everyone seemed to talk at once in hoarse, unrestrained voices. Tired laughter took on a hopeful note.

When work began again it sped forward with fresh impetus. A storehouse was built; canoes were laboriously hollowed out of logs for transporting supplies down the Great Kanawha. Men sat on the

ground repairing the camp tools. Brad Stevens complained of the delay and was ordered off with the detail taking the pack-horses back to Camp Union for flour. Toward evening of the same day Timothy Fitzpatrick was tried for stealing a gun, and although he was acquitted, the camp divided itself on the matter. Nerves began to tighten, and some of the men spread stories of Indian tracks along the river bank. As the tension increased three scouts were sent up Elk River toward Pocatamico, three across the Kanawha to Coal River, and some down the Kanawha on the north side.

There was less and less leisure as the days went on. In the evenings Sheldon and Clen helped tend the sick, carrying water and medicines. They began to wonder if Captain Stuart had given orders to work them to the limit of their endurance. They hardly had energy to stuff their rations into their mouths as the other men did, and at night, when they tried to sleep, the miserable aching in backs, arms and legs kept them tossing restlessly.

Eleven days after they had pitched camp, Captain Stuart sent for Sheldon. The groans of the sick from the sheltered clearings were audible in the Captain's tent. Stuart was deeply disturbed by their suffering. His massive figure stooped slightly as he stood with his hands clasped behind his back. His forehead was deep-lined, his eyes somber and steady.

"Hear them? It is the most terrible thing in war—the sick, lost in the wilderness, longing for home. It's enough to break the spirit." He addressed Sheldon in a low voice, then sat down slowly on the stump behind the split log that served him for a table. "I sent for you because Sergeant O'Hara is sick. I want you to replace him."

"Thank you, sir," Sheldon said, trying to conceal a swift tide of pleasure at being chosen before older and more experienced men. It was more than he had dared to hope for so soon.

"The men respect you and they respect my judgment," Stuart said, abruptly. "But insubordination is not a common thing among these men."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"You have only to carry out orders," Stuart said. He drummed on the shaven surface of the log. "There is one other matter. You own a slave named Lacey?"

Sheldon, startled by the question, stammered. "Why, yes, sir."

Stuart went on, his voice for the first time harsh and impatient. "The rascal's been following the Augusta Regiment, making inquiries for you along the way. We took his horse and reckoned that would be the end of him, but he's still here. I'll have him sent to you, though God knows what you're going to do with him."

"I'll deal with him, sir." For the briefest instant Sheldon hesitated before saluting. Then he brought his arm up briskly, turned on his heel and walked out of the tent. The unspoken epithets that had risen to his lips at this startling news of Lacey broke forth with violence when he was beyond earshot of Stuart. Damn Cappy and Hattie. They had promised to keep Lacey at Bellevue! What in God's name could he do with the slave out here, and how, in the name of all the saints had Lacey managed to travel this far when he'd never before been farther west than the boundaries of Shipley? "I'll whip him for this disobedience," he told himself. But he knew even as he thought it that he wouldn't whip Lacey.

At midday, when Lacey was sent to him, he drew the slave out of earshot of his companions. "What in God's name are you doing here?" he thundered. In spite of his tone, there was little hardness in his eye as it ran the length of Lacey's gaunt figure. The slave's blue canvas breeches, tied with rope around his shrunken waist, were jagged with brier tears and his arms and legs were scratched and streaked with crusted blood.

"Ah reckoned yo'all jes plum fergit ter tak me with yuh, Mars Sheldon. An' Ah says to myself, nigger, yo' bettah make tracks effen yo' specs ever ter fine Mars Sheldon again."

"Didn't Cappy and Hattie tell you not to follow me?"

"Yassuh. But Ah tole 'em Ah don' tak no word from nobody 'cept Mars Sheldon."

Sheldon's voice blazed up in reproach. "God's teeth, Lacey! What do you expect me to do with you out here?"

"Looks lak yo'll need me," the slave replied simply, putting critical eyes on Sheldon's shabby hunting shirt and lean, leathery face. "Looks lak yo' don' git nuf ter eat, Mars Sheldon. Ah kin shoot rabbits an' squirrels yo' kin eat all tuh yo'self."

"You're not doing any shooting, Lacey, unless you want a flogging. That's orders. Do you understand?"

Lacey's black face drooped sullenly. Sheldon laid his hand on his

shoulder, feeling a sharp ridge of collar bone and shoulder blade. "Have you had anything to eat?" he asked with sudden compassion.

"Ah had sumpin'," Lacey replied vaguely.

Sheldon gave him a gentle shove. "Well, go along. You can have the rest of my rations." Then he added with sternness that left the slave nodding dumbly. "I don't want to catch sight of you unless you're hungry, do you hear?"

7

DRUMS beat at daybreak the next morning, releasing tense nerves in a flood of activity. A fleet of twenty-seven canoes, manned by men from all the companies, picked for wiry strength and knowledge of strong river currents, went up the Elk a mile and a half to a fording. Jim Hughes and Willie McClure, cursing men and animals alike, drove their cattle and pack-horses over; then the army crossed and camp was pitched on the level plain below the mouth of the Elk. Before long rain broke in a heavy, incessant sheet, and the restless army floundered in mud for two days before the last, long march down the Great Kanawha.

The Botetourt Line drawing up into the left column, led the march. The Augusta Line formed the right and both flanks were covered by a hundred men each. Beef cattle and pack-horses were driven to the center. A stocky soldier behind Sheldon said, "That's a sure sign we're getting into Indian country." He slapped the barrel of his rifle. "Won't be none too soon for me."

For five days the line marched, shortening their way ten miles every day. Their spirits seemed to blend in one encompassing force, driving them on with sure but cautious strength—past Coal River, across the Pocatalico, through the narrows at Red House Shoals; on by the Fallen Timber where the hills were swept bare as a field.

Sheldon's promotion was accepted with good grace by his men. Will told him they didn't mind a young fellow taking responsibility. All they gave a damn about was fighting the Indians, anyhow, and the sooner they got that done, the better. "But," he added, "when they get to fightin', don't try too hard to give 'em orders. More'n likely, they won't hear you."

Sheldon laughed. "They'll have to give me orders, then."

"You can give 'em to me," Clen put in, "along with a tot of rum."

When they halted at night, never unmindful of any sound or sign, they spoke in constrained voices around the camp fires. Sheldon noticed that much of Will's humor had given place to a grave and watchful expression, and when he dropped to the ground between him and Clen, his rifle was always at his side. Clen's face seemed to have lengthened from its pudgy lines and to reflect much of Will's wariness. He was seldom out of Will's shadow, on the march or in camp, and all of the older soldier's soft-spoken cautioning became the core of his knowledge.

The scouts came back from the Coal River, mingling among the men after making their reports. Tense ears strained to catch their words. There were tracks of fifteen or more Indians where they had encamped on the bank. Colonel Lewis had sent Captain Arbuckle and his own picked men after them. As day followed day, fresh reports drew the men's nerves taut as bowstrings and fanned cold fire in their wary eyes. Tracks of two horses and three moccasined feet had passed them in the night, going downriver. James Fowler came back from the Great Kanawha and told them of two fires he had seen on the bank. "They covered 'em up when I made a noise," he said.

"Sure you saw 'em?" someone asked in a hard, low-pitched voice.

"I ain't blind," he threw back. "An' when I was comin' by canoe up the river, huggin' the shore like it was my own mother, I saw a dozen o' them redskins goin' downriver with their horses. Looks like they're comin' from all directions. I'd say they wasn't aimin' to be short o' numbers."

The scout's words sent a spasm of fear crawling along Sheldon's spine. Maybe they were marching into a trap. All the time the line was marching to join Dunmore's Northern Division, the Indians were probably waiting to bottle them up in some defile. It would be easy enough then to sweep down and murder them all.

Night held the men in fear of ambush; the silence of the camp was broken only by low, strained laughter and talk. When daylight came, they talked more boldly, laughing a little at their fears. It was one thing to meet the Indians in battle, even in their chosen forest sanctuary, and something else to be cut off and annihilated

on the march.

At length they rose to a triangular point of land. Below them the heavy forest dropped away to the crimson junction of the Ohio and the Great Kanawha. Over the men the blood-red setting sun spread warmth and welcome. Backs straightened and heads came up erect, sweeping aside the constricting bands of fatigue and apprehension. To Sheldon and Clen it was like their first glimpse of the valley of the Shenandoah and the remote, purple ridges of the Alleghenies. They gave themselves up to it as they would have dropped to a spring of clear, icy water.

This was the end of nineteen long days of marching. Someone called it Camp Point Pleasant and the men gratefully took up the name.

8

THOUGHT of fear now was a shameful thing to the army settled in the forks of the Kanawha. Their strength seemed greater than any the Indian tribes could muster, and even Clen's spirits revived at the knowledge of their force. Will, in his slow, deliberate way, continued to talk to them of wood fighting. One day he taught them how to throw a tomahawk, and they practiced on the soft bark of the birch. When he drew out his scalping knife and started to explain its use, pulling his hair above the crown of his head to demonstrate, his protégés weakened for the first time.

"It's no use, Will," Sheldon protested. "I couldn't scalp a man if I had the chance."

Color had fled from Clen's round cheeks, and Will laughed. "Lacey!" he shouted at the negro sitting on the ground at a little distance from them.

Lacey came to his side.

"Shall I teach you how to use the scalping knife?" Will tapped the blade on his thumb.

"No, suh!" Lacey backed away slowly.

"All right. We'll skip that lesson. But sit down and listen to what I say about using the trees for cover."

He repeated his advice, drawing diagrams in the soft earth to show how a man who knew what he was doing could advance from

tree to tree without exposing himself too much. "Your eyes have to see four directions at the same time," he finished. Lacey nodded dumbly, his eyes seeming big enough to accomplish the feat with ease.

Will turned his head slowly toward Clen. "The men say you know how to use your gun and your feet. They know."

Clen's color returned a little at the first word of praise he had heard since he had left Staunton. It was true that when he lifted his rifle to his shoulder, he usually brought flesh to the boiling pot, but he had always taken his marksmanship for granted and it seemed no better to him than that of the other men. It was the same as learning to move noiselessly in the woods. It was a part of hunting that had come naturally to him. When he trod the carpet of oak leaves and pine needles his feet moved like the feet of Indians, and his generous bulk slid like an eel past the leafy branches of shrub and tree. Sheldon, in spite of his slimness of hip and thigh and length of limb, would create a stir of boughs, a crackling of desiccated leaves, where Clen moved silently before him. It annoyed him that he couldn't fathom the secret of Clen's movement. He wondered how his friend could tire so easily on the march, yet be so tireless in hunting.

As Clen's reputation filtered through the camp, the men who had seen in his eyes the dull light of fear, began to wonder if they had not been mistaken. Surely no one who could shoot with such unerring skill had need of fear. Clen, himself, began to disclaim it aloud; to laugh and joke about it with Sheldon who, he knew, had interpreted the signs so often. But once, in the deep stillness of night, when they seemed to be the only ones awake before the low fire, Clen said suddenly, "Do you still think I'm frightened, Sheldon, and not of much use?"

"No, Clen, I don't," Sheldon answered softly. "Nobody does, now."

WHEN Colonel Charles Lewis had arrived at Point Pleasant on the 6th of October, he had found waiting for him, in the hollow of a tree, dispatches which Simon Kenton and two companions had

brought from Lord Dunmore. His temper had grown wilder as he read them. His Lordship ordered him to meet the Northern Division at the mouth of the Big Hockhocking where Major Crawford was building a stockade. He summoned his officers and gave them the news. He had known what the answer would be. There was serious sickness in the ranks. The men were unfit to move. Lewis himself was sick of the Governor's vacillating orders. Where did Dunmore think they were that they could move hither and yon at his beck and call? Had he forgotten that they were in Indian country, and that the combined tribes might fall on them and cut them to pieces if they attempted a long march when their force was so greatly depleted? It was sixty miles by water and more than thirty by land to the Big Hockhocking, and it was less than either to the hostile towns they had set out to attack. Besides the danger to his own force, if Lewis turned aside from the attack to join Dunmore that would leave the frontier settlements of Virginia open to the Indians. It was madness, and Lewis and his men knew it, but a reply had to be sent. They would march as soon as all troops, food supply and powder had reached Point Pleasant. That would delay their movement for at least ten days.

The rebellious spirit of the men rose like a gathering storm. Why obey the Governor's orders because he was afraid to move his own men? Some of the older men said Dunmore was trying to avoid war, now that he had reached the Ohio. Will was smugly complacent.

"It doesn't surprise me," he said to Sheldon. "He got Conolly to stir up this trouble and now he doesn't want to risk his own precious hide."

On the heels of the first dispatches came another, bearing the unmistakable tone of command, and Lewis began preparations for transporting his troops across the river. The camp was in an angry fever, men grumbling and cursing over every duty that brought departure nearer. Lewis's huge figure seemed to shake the earth as he stalked among his men. There was none of his jovial light humor to drive them on about their work, but a grim, relentless determination that the results of this folly were going to rest squarely on the Governor's head. He could hardly resent the rebellious comments that reached his ears from all sides. The men were willing enough to follow him, but Dunmore was asking them to play fox

and hounds all over the Ohio frontier. They had come to fight and they wanted to get on with it in the quickest possible way.

Early the next morning Clen and Joe Hughy of Shelby's Company set off up the bank of the Ohio to hunt for deer. In the deep and dismal solitude of the forest, their silent tread stirred no echo, and no woodland sound, however slight, escaped their notice. In all the starlit morning, they seemed to be the only living things, save when some small creature, disturbed, let out its protest.

When they had gone about two miles up the river, Hughy, leading the way, gave a stifled cry. Simultaneously, the crack of a rifle split the air to shreds. With the echo of the shot, Hughy spun on his heel and fell to the ground. Almost before he had fallen, Clen aimed his rifle at the thick cover ahead. His finger was steady on the trigger, but a spasm of nerves shook the core of his body. He fired once, and the figure of a white man stumbled from the shrubbery and fell. He pushed quickly ahead, then saw that behind the white man lay an Indian encampment and that around and within it Indians by the hundreds were gathered.

Instinctively, his legs withdrew him from that place of death, but the shots had already aroused the warriors. He tightened his grip on his rifle and began to run. In one backward glance he saw that he had shot the white man and that the Indians had not yet set out after him. When he reached Captain Stuart's tent he was exhausted and breathless.

Will, Sheldon and half a dozen of his men had been waiting to get their share of the kill. When they saw Clen running they hurried forward, circling him anxiously. Sheldon went quickly to his side and gripped his arm.

"What's the matter with you, Clen?" he asked softly, and the men were silent, waiting to hear, their eyes turning in alarm to the rim of the woods.

Clen's eyes were wide with terror and his mouth sagged open, sucking in deep draughts of air. Then he gulped hard and spoke. "There's about five acres—covered with Indians—thick as they can stand—one beside the other." He paused until his breathing became easier, but the men around him stiffened. Some, not waiting to hear more, ran back among their sleeping companions.

Clen turned to face Sheldon, his skin startlingly white against his red hair. "A white man killed Hughy—a white man dressed like an Indian!"

The men about him gasped, the sound seeming to come from a single throat. Sheldon pulled him toward Stuart's tent. "You must report quickly!"

Stuart came from the tent as he spoke. "What's all the excitement?"

Clen repeated his words, and before he had finished speaking, two scouts ran up and confirmed his report.

Stuart's mouth tightened. "Arouse the men." He gave the order to Sheldon, then turning on his heel ran off toward General Lewis's tent.

When Sheldon put his arm around Clen's shoulder and tried to lead him back to theirs, he shook it off gently.

"I'm all right," he said, and his voice was steady. He began to run at Sheldon's side, talking in measured gasps. "There must have been thousands of them. Their faces were hideous—all painted. They shot Hughy—before he had a chance—to escape. It was a white man—that did it. Now we can fight—and I hope I'm in the front of the line."

When they reached their tent they saw that the camp had already been electrified into action. Clen said slowly, "I couldn't bring Hughy back. He was dead. If I'd been killed, too—"

"You would have been a fool to have tried," Sheldon reassured him.

General Lewis heard the news with scarcely a change in his expression. With a steady hand he lit his pipe and ordered out the first division under his brother, Colonel Charles Lewis, and then the second under Colonel Fleming. With Captain Stuart at his side he watched the men form ranks and move off, and saw the growing signs of restlessness among those left behind. The faintest smile parted his lips. Fate had played into his hands conveniently. Dunmore could wait in vain at the Big Hockhocking.

Sheldon and Clen watched the confident lines march out, Colonel Lewis's to the right, away from the river and Colonel Fleming's to the left along its bank. Then they turned back to their flints and

priming, but as they tested pans and flint-locks, their ears were alert for the first sound of firing. Sheldon went among his men, feeling closer to them now that the time had come to fight. Captain Stuart had told him that they would go next when the signal came. As he spread the word, a muffled cheer followed him, and hands moved quickly from rifle or musket to powder horn and shot bag. Some sharpened knives and tomahawks on broad, flat stones. And all their faces, in the increasing light of day, were like their knives—hard and sharp. Sheldon thought, as he looked at them, that no savages, murdering and burning and torturing, were more dangerous than the men they would meet this day.

When Sheldon finished his inspection he called Lacey to his side and handed him his knife. For a puzzled instant he searched the negro's rigid face. He could see that Lacey knew the test which was coming was not so much of strength as of wiliness; not so much of good aim as of skill with unfamiliar weapons—and in this cunning and dexterity he had never been schooled. He took the knife from Sheldon with trembling fingers. Sometimes he had seen men fighting with knives in the quarters at Shipley, gashing and mutilating each other, and the bloody sight had given him a horror of cold, sharp steel. That was not his life. He had been born to ride the little brown mare across golden fields behind his master. Yet, here he was, with a knife in his own hand for the first time, and his master was telling him to kill.

"I'm telling you this, Lacey, in case the Indians push our men back and attack the camp. You are to stay here." Sheldon held his slave's eyes steadily. "Do you understand that, Lacey?"

Lacey nodded, but he said slowly, meaningly, "I ain't afeared."

"You can go down where the men are building the breastwork across the delta and help them cut trees. Tell Sergeant Mallory I sent you." Lacey went off reluctantly, dragging his feet across the brown earth.

Will laughed suddenly. "That'll please Mallory."

"I've got to get him away from here. I don't want him following me."

Will rubbed his cheek with a broad, dirty palm. "That there breastwork should've been built when we first got here. If the Governor had let Lewis alone it would've been."

Will's words set Sheldon to wondering. Was this really Dunmore's fault, as Will and the men seemed to think; or had the spirit of friction and rebellion seeped westward to the frontier? It looked as if you couldn't even get men to fight a common enemy without fighting one another, too.

His thoughts were broken suddenly by the piercing din of white men's shouting and Indian yells. The men pushed forward around him, their eyes boring into the fringe of woods. Captain Stuart strode up, trying to make himself heard above the cracking of rifle and musket shots and the long-drawn wails and screams of the dying and wounded.

"Don't move until you get your orders!" Stuart yelled. The men's eyes shifted questioningly to their captain's. "Follow me," he ordered Sheldon, and turning on his heel led the way rapidly back toward his tent. Bands of men, cursing and restless, surged around them.

"We got to get our wounded out o' there," someone cried. "Them bastards 'll scalp 'em alive."

Outside his tent, Stuart turned to Sheldon. "If these men don't obey orders, they'll be cut to pieces. A premature movement will be the end of us. Cornstalk is leading the Indian tribes, and they're all fighting us—Shawnees, Delawares, Mingoes, Wyandots—the whole lot of 'em. Cornstalk's a great leader. Our plan is to try to outflank him. We're to move up the Kanawha with Shelby's company under cover of the banks and weeds to the mouth of Crooked Creek, and then along the river bed until we've got well behind the enemy. When we get our orders, bring your men to the other side of the camp, just down the slope. And caution them, as they value their lives, not to make a sound."

Sheldon nodded, the hollow thumping of his heart like a steady drum-beat. "Which way is the battle going, sir?"

"Can't tell," Stuart said.

The sun rose high above the woods. Sheldon walked away deep in thought. This was what they had been waiting for, but they had never thought of it in terms of death and suffering and annihilation. Perhaps they had underestimated the red enemy. He glanced toward the woods where many of the Virginians already lay dead, and then he saw a broad, bent figure moving unsteadily out of the

shadows into the full, yellow sunlight, pressing his hand against his scarlet waistcoat. For a moment he stood still, his eyes unbelieving. Then he ran forward. "Colonel Lewis! Wait, wait, sir!"

Lewis looked up and Sheldon saw that his face was ashen and twisted with pain. But when he came nearer he saw Lewis smile and there was relief in his expression. Beyond his fingers a scarlet stain spread. Sheldon took his arm and led him back to the camp, and when the men who had finally seen them ran up he said, "Let us carry you, sir."

"No, I can walk," Lewis protested, but his steps grew more halting and his lips drew back from his teeth in a rigid line. When he approached his tent, he stretched out his hand, groaned heavily, and collapsed.

Sheldon and a white-faced private lifted him up and carried him to his cot. The other men walked away speechlessly, to carry news as bitter as defeat.

Within the tent, Sheldon knelt on the ground beside Lewis and examined his wound. It showed ragged and wide through the hole in his shirt. He tore a piece from the bottom of his own shirt, soaked it in the bucket of drinking water and laid it across the wound.

The sound of heavy footsteps ended at the tent opening. "Charles!" Sheldon looked up into General Lewis's flushed face. "I just heard." He came into the tent and took Sheldon's place beside the cot. Gently he lifted the cloth, then replaced it and took his brother's hands between his own. Sheldon walked out softly, but he heard the General say in a low voice, "You shouldn't have worn that scarlet waistcoat. I thought something fatal would befall you."

Charles Lewis's reply was scarcely audible. "It is the fate of war."

Sheldon knew from the silence that followed, and by the General's slow tread as he came away from his brother's bedside, that Colonel Lewis was dead.

THE Indian tribes had formed a line extending across the point from the Ohio to the Kanawha, protected in front by fallen timber and logs. In this position they determined to cut off all chance of

escape to the Colonial army when they had defeated them. They were fighting with savage fury, fed by a fierce hatred of their white enemy and by Cornstalk's relentless leadership. By rushes, he planned to drive the Virginians into the rivers like so many bullocks, knowing that there was no retreat across to the other side, guarded by his braves half way to the mouth of Crooked Creek. Calmly he watched the two enemy lines fall back and then come on again with fresh impetuosity. His yelling, grotesquely painted men held firmly until the Virginians, abandoning gun-fire, rushed in on them, clubbing wildly with heavy gun-stocks. As men dropped with crushed skulls from the forefront of the Indian line, they began to waver.

"Be strong! Be strong!" Cornstalk's fierce cry shook the line to a fresh attack. They would rather face death from the Virginians, than the proud, contemptuous figure of the Chief. But here and there a terrified brave attempted to retreat from the murderous fire and knives. A quick grimace of disgust crossed Cornstalk's high-boned features. He plunged his own knife into the back of one as he passed and ordered the others tomahawked. Then his calm, enigmatical expression returned. The battle was going well for his people again. Two of the white chiefs had been driven from the field, forcing a break in the attack, and where one of them, as he fell, had tried to press his torn lung back into the cavity of his chest, a little group of Virginians stood staring, unnerved.

The banks of Crooked Creek were high, covered with a thick growth of weeds. General Lewis studied them long and critically. The time had come for a decision. If the battle was not ended by nightfall the Indians, under cover of darkness, would fall upon them and massacre them all. He resolved to throw a body of men into the rear of the Indian army.

Sheldon led his men to the bank to meet Captain Stuart with the rest of the company. Shelby's and Mathew's men followed. Silently they formed in single file behind their leaders. As they crept along the bank, Sheldon felt a prickling along his spine to the roots of his hair. Then he saw Clen, moving up beside him on the uneven ground. His face was white, but his eyes were steady and fearless. Sheldon smiled to himself and the blood came warmly back to his limbs.

Presently Stuart motioned them to break cover. Silently they formed ranks, ears trained for any sound that would betray the Indians' knowledge of their position. The fate of the Colonial army depended on this move. If they could make Cornstalk believe that Colonel Christian had arrived from the north with aid, they might force a general rout. Even the courageous Cornstalk could not hold his men firm against those odds.

They marched to the point of Crooked Creek and climbed a high bluff. Stuart, Shelby and Mathew moved like shadows among their men. "Pour it into 'em and yell. We've got to make 'em think there're thousands of us. Give 'em grinders, boys!"

A wild, rending cry broke with the volleys of muskets and rifles from the bluff. Cornstalk saw the movement of the force making its way to the Indian rear. The advance from the north—fresh men and ammunition—and already his braves were sorely tried! There would be cowardice and retreat and he would have to slaughter his frightened men to keep the others in the battle. His imperturbable mask dropped, betraying confusion and panic. A cry of alarm stiffened his men and when he gave the order to retreat to the other side of Old Town Creek, they turned in bewildered disorder. Unaware of the force on the bluff, the Virginians pressed on, firing with deadly accuracy into the dispirited Indian ranks, butchering the stragglers with tomahawks and knives until they had dislodged the Indians from a fine long ridge leading from a small slash near the river toward the hills. With renewed confidence they surged on, across a small wet bottom and up the hills half a mile from the river. Then the Indians turned to protect their rear and met the force from the bluff.

A triumphant roar went up from the Virginians as they poured down the wooded slope with raised knives and tomahawks. When the forefront of the line broke to the right, Sheldon caught a brief sight of Clen, standing alone in the open. He had raised his rifle to his shoulder and seemed to be firing into the ground, but when Sheldon followed his aim he saw that Will lay on the bloody earth in the grip of an Indian as agile and powerful as himself and that he was straining to reach the tomahawk poised above his head. With the echo of Clen's shot, the tomahawk dropped to the ground. The Indian gave a convulsive jerk and pitched across Will's body.

Clen stood where he was, as if dazed.

"A tree! Get behind a tree!" Sheldon yelled across the clearing, but the din of shouts and gun-fire and the strident cries of the wounded drowned the words as they left his lips. He bent and ran forward, yelling as he went, stumbling and pitching headlong over fallen bodies, picking himself up. Half way in his stride something searing hot tore through his shoulder and knocked the rifle from his hand. A look of utter surprise crossed his face and then the pain began to spread in vicious, throbbing waves. Suddenly, though the pain choked off his breath, his brain cleared. He must get to Clen, force him to cover! He stooped to recover his rifle and saw the flash of steel and a reddish arm glistening with sweat and bear grease. He raised his eyes, and tensed his muscles to spring. In one movement, he picked up his rifle and side-stepping the Indian's quick thrust of the knife, swung the heavy stock against the red man's head as he stumbled forward. The Indian made no sound. Then Sheldon saw, as he raised the rifle to strike again, that a grayish, blood-streaked mass had spilled from the Indian's skull onto the forest floor.

When he rose from the ground, his eyes searched the clearing, but the sight that he saw meant nothing to him at first but death and retreat. Clen was gone and the Indians were fleeing in disorder. Almost all the men remaining in the woods were Virginians. The dead lay about in grotesque attitudes that betrayed their last tortured moments. Entrails strewn limply from torn bodies were already a feasting place for bloated flies. Someone ran past him holding his hands to the bloody cavities where his eyes had been, and then he saw Clen's broad, curved back. He stood with his blood slowly freezing and a deathly sickness in the pit of his stomach. For several minutes he remained insensible to the action around him before he could stir himself to move. Then he walked forward slowly. When he reached Clen's side, he dropped to his knees and put out his hand to turn him over. Suddenly he lifted his head and screamed, carrying upward in his eyes the sight of a red-streaked scalp. He screamed, though the cords of his throat were near to bursting. Whirling shadows enveloped him and then thought fled before thick blackness.

PART IV

THE HANOVER VOLUNTEERS

IT SEEMED that the nightmare would never end. Late November came, cold and dreary, to the wounded in the stockade that had been built at Camp Point Pleasant. And with it came the news that most of the army, led by General Lewis, had gone on to the Pickaway Plains to meet Lord Dunmore who was determined to sign a treaty with the Indians in spite of the heated protests of his officers, who thought the victory should have been followed up by annihilation of the tribes.

Sheldon heard of it with a feeling of helpless rage. The battle had been for nothing. Clen and hundreds of other Virginians had been killed in a struggle which had ended in a treaty that was a humiliation to every white man present. It would have been better to have lost the battle than to allow their struggle to be infamously degraded.

Will begged him to be calm, telling him of the other frontier battles that had ended as ignominiously as this, but it was days before they could talk of it soberly and even then it was difficult to do, for there was bitterness in the eyes of the other men who nursed their wounds and spoke of revenge.

"I'm going back to Fredericksburg," Sheldon said at last.

"A few days more," Will promised, "and you'll be fit to travel. It will be a long, hard journey and we will need good horses. I'll wheedle 'em out of Jim Hughes by then."

"I'll be a burden to you any time, Will, horses or no, but don't make me wait too long. I want to get out of this." In the days that followed, Sheldon returned again and again to the question of leaving and finally to the mystery of Lacey. "He may be afraid to come back. But if he's dead I've got to know. He may be hurt but I've got to be sure."

Every day he had hoped to see the slave walk into the stockade, fighting against the knowledge that only a miracle could have saved Lacey if he had been in that wilderness of death. The men who

had brought back the wounded and buried the dead had reported no sign of a negro and Will was certain that he had been killed.

They never spoke of Clen, but Sheldon knew that Will's hatred of Lord Dunmore was as much bound up with Clen's death as was his own hatred for the Governor; that suspicion of Dunmore's motives, fanned into flaming certainty by the reckless accusations of the men around them, was as much responsible for Will's deadened spirit as it was for his own slow convalescence. In the evenings when they sat alone, staring into the mesmeric glow of the camp fire, there were long silences, and when they were broken their words were bitter with resentment against the deception that had moved them to join the expedition. But always there was a trace of irony in Will's words, and in Sheldon's there was only the uncompromising strain of bitterness. His theme seldom varied. They had come to keep faith with the settlers. Instead, there had been shameful, inglorious bargaining on the heels of a hard-won victory with an enemy who would have given no such quarter had he been the victor. Nothing had been gained but the Indians' promise never to molest the frontier settlements again, as if in that promise there could be any reliance. Bitterness was so strong against Dunmore that the guard around his marquee had to be tripled. The wounded men in the stockade heard of the threatening antagonism with grim smiles, knowing that only respect for General Lewis prevented open rebellion. Contempt burned in their eyes, as in Sheldon's, sweeping away all the patriotic fervor they had shared.

Lacey wandered into camp when the pack-horses were being loaded with provisions and blankets. Thin as a reed, exhausted and frightened, he told them that he had hidden in the woods on the fringe of the fighting, living on berries and nuts until after the Indians had fled. Sheldon fed him and gave him a day to recover enough strength to go back with them. Then on a bright, cloudless morning, with Nero and Clen's horse, Sprightly, they began the long journey over the mountains to the Tidewater. Lacey led the pack-horse, trudging with bent head behind Sheldon and Will. His silence and evasive glances spoke of the shame that he never mentioned. He seemed to be waiting for the rebuke that never came and to be fearful of mentioning the battle or Clen's death. In the eve-

nings he worked ceaselessly, preparing the game they killed on the way, picking berries and carrying water until his head drooped and he could no longer keep awake. Then Will would rouse himself, light his pipe with a glowing ember from the cooking fire, prop himself against a tree and continue the watch through the night.

The days of the journey seemed endless, but Sheldon took strength from them all, growing used to the dull pain in his shoulder, supported by a soiled linen sling. He had learned how to ease its sagging weight by twisting a twig in the narrow folds of the sling where it crossed his chest. Only when they stopped in the evening was he willing to stretch out on the ground and let Lacey tend him.

For most of the way they traveled in silence, the sequence of events in the wilderness behind them passing in turmoil through their minds. The dense stretches of forest, the life of the clearings, the separateness of the country beyond the mountains—that was America, too. But there nothing counted save the fact of existence and of holding to the land that had been won. There picayune squabbles and over-fed pride dissolved in their own insignificance. The physical quality of the country gave precedence to nothing. But into a portion of that country had been intruded the pettiness and fear and treachery of a Royal Governor from the civilized East, and the expedition had become a shameful thing.

Will brought Sheldon back to Staunton alive, but the three weeks' journey had reduced him to a frame of skin and bones. His cheeks, beneath the high ridges of bone, had sunken in deep hollows and his eyes held the bitterness of defeat.

When they parted, Sheldon had scarcely any energy left to tell Will of his gratitude. Only the firm pressure of his handshake, his slow smile and steady, affectionate glance could express what Will already knew he felt.

"You'll come to Bellevue on your next journey to Fredericksburg?" Sheldon asked. "You'll soon have skins to sell, and the gentry buy as well as the merchants. I'll make Aunt Florrie your best customer."

"I hope the gentry are more reliable than the merchants," Will laughed. "Most of 'em would cheat you out of a ha'penny."

"Promise you'll come."

Will grinned. "I'll come when there's a good cause we can fight

for." Suddenly his face sobered. "I know, by rights, it should be Clen standing here in my place. That's hard to forget."

Sheldon looked at him for a long time without speaking. He couldn't deny the truth. "I think he had a premonition of death, Will."

Sheldon rode into Piper's Landing ten days later, but Major Ward had gone to Philadelphia.

"When will your master return?" he asked the servant who let him in.

"Dunno, suh. He grievin' so 'bout Mars Clen, reckon he don' nevah wanter come home." The negro's lips quivered loosely.

"He knows, then?" Sheldon said.

"Yassuh. Gempmun from Fredericksburg, he come tole him."

Sheldon rode away with a feeling of relief that the ordeal had not fallen to him. He had dreaded this meeting with Major Ward, and yet he knew that the old soldier would be glad to hear of Clen's bravery. Later, when the time came to tell him, it would be easier for both of them.

When he turned into Bellevue, the bordering elms were nearly leafless and the land and the house lay drab under a sullen sky, but it was a more welcome sight than he had ever thought it could be. For the first time in weeks, his step was light as he reached the door in three strides. In the broad hall he stood still, straining for the sound of Miss Florrie's voice. He wanted to hear it! He wanted Miss Florrie to talk nonsense to him! There would be long, luxurious days in bed and Hattie's cooking to enjoy. Days of sleep and rest and, perhaps, blessed forgetfulness. Then he might be of use again.

2

"You have grown bitter, Sheldon," Miss Florrie said, without lifting her eyes from her needlework.

"Bitter!" Sheldon repeated softly. "Aunt Florrie, every soldier who fought in General Lewis's army is bitter!" He had been over it with her so often. There was no use repeating it. He fell into a brooding silence, leaning back against the window frame to watch

her sew. Only once had he spoken of Clen's death. After a sleepless night he had described it to her through choking, irrepressible sobs. He had never mentioned it again.

Since she had come to fear that his bitterness would lead him into the ever-growing group clamoring against English injustice, she was afraid that emotion, rather than reason, would influence him. Despite her Loyatism Miss Florrie had a secret admiration for Patrick Henry, who had forced a thin wedge of doubt into her Loyalist mind. If Sheldon, in his rebellious state of mind, should choose to follow Henry, his convictions and emotions could easily be poured into the mould of such a leader.

Sheldon broke the thread of her disturbing thoughts. The rapid stitching ceased momentarily and she looked up at him, standing where the light from the window fell across one side of his face. How thin he was, she observed anxiously; how tired and sunken his eyes.

"I am going to Chericoke," he announced, resting his injured arm in the palm of his hand.

"I thought you would," she said, and something in her voice checked him.

"Why?"

"Because you do not think I understand." She met his eyes challengingly.

"Do you, Aunt Florrie?"

She nodded and returned to her stitching to hide the quick coloring of her cheeks. "You are close to my heart, Sheldon. I feel what I do not seem to see." As if ashamed of her sentiment, she hurried on. "If I cannot comfort you, I wish you could find it with friends who will not lead you into trouble."

Sheldon crossed the room and dropped to his knees beside her chair. Gently he took the needles from her fingers. "Colonel Braxton has no wish to lead me into trouble, Aunt Florrie."

Her eyes followed the curve of his long fingers. "There are too many ready to take offense at every slightest effort of Parliament to govern us."

"You are a Loyalist," he smiled.

"Aren't you?" She asked the question with a startled lift of her brows.

"I don't know," he answered slowly. Then he laughed and kissed the cool skin of her forehead, but she pulled away, visibly shocked.

"When you talk like that I have no more patience with you than with the rest of those hot-headed"—she choked and her skin, the color of old ivory, began to redden—"so-called patriots," she finished.

He let her hands go and got to his feet. "Colonel Braxton is not breathing fire, Aunt Florrie. You can depend on it that I shall take his advice. He will know what father would have said."

"Your dear father," Miss Florrie told him firmly, "would have advised you to grow tobacco."

Before he left for Chericoke, exciting news came with the *Virginia Gazette*. Patrick Henry, returning from the first Congress, had given notice to the militia of Hanover to meet him at Mr. Smith's tavern in the neighborhood of Hanover Court House where he wished to communicate something to them of great importance. In consequence, they had been formed into an independent company, and had been equipped for any emergency. Muskets, ammunition, bayonets and cartouche-boxes had been supplied to them since the summons, and other counties were preparing to follow Fairfax and Hanover.

Sheldon read and re-read the news. He had said that he would never fight for the colonies while Lord Dunmore was Governor, but if it was against His Lordship that he fought—! The ominous message pointed in that direction, and to follow Henry would mean resolute action instead of the fearful conniving of the Royal Governor.

He hid the *Gazette* from Miss Florrie. If she saw it now, she would know what he intended to do. There would be another scene, more unpleasant than he cared to imagine. He would tell her later—

A sky of broken, putty-colored clouds hung over Chericoke. Lawn and river merged together under a lengthening shadow cast by the low-riding moon. Out of the north came a cold wind that rocked the

boughs of oak and cedar and whipped the carpet of leaves in dark eddies. The square brick house stood like a somber sentinel against the wind.

Sheldon drew rein and dismounted, leaving Nero to the care of a sleepy negro boy. He pulled his collar tight about his throat and gazed up at the sky. The wind billowed his cloak out behind him as he mounted the steps to the door and dropped the knocker heavily onto the brass plate. Presently the door was opened just enough for him to slip into the hall. The servant shivered slightly in the draught and murmured a good evening; then, when the candlelight fell full on Sheldon's face, he cried, "Bless me, Mars Sheldon! Ah didn't seed it was you. Mars Carter he complains ob de cold till Ah scarce dares open de doah." He took Sheldon's cloak from his shoulders and stared at his arm, still supported by a sling. "Lawdy, Mars Sheldon, what's yo'all done tuh y'ahm?"

"Indian bit me," Sheldon told him with a mock frown. "Nearly bit it off!" He patted Sam's shoulder. "They didn't treat me very kindly in the Illinois country."

The whites of Sam's eyes gleamed. "Lawd, Lawd," he muttered.

Then he turned and led the way to the library. "Miss Elizabeth's visitin' Colonel Corbin at Laneville but Mars Braxton, he be glad ter see yuh. Mr. Moore and Mr. Buford and Miss Evelyn, dey's here, too."

Sam's words set Sheldon's blood to pounding. He would rather have seen Evelyn alone, the first time, but neither her father nor Mr. Bernard Moore could spoil the pleasure of this meeting. Sam opened the door and he strode past him into the room. Braxton was instantly on his feet, taking Sheldon's hand in a hard grip. "This is an unexpected pleasure," he exclaimed, then his eyes fell on the sling. "I hope that isn't serious. You were wounded?"

Sheldon nodded. "It's really nothing, sir," Sheldon told him. "Nothing but an inconvenience."

"The first scar of battle," Braxton said softly. "You are a veteran now, Sheldon." Then he stepped aside. "Here are friends of yours."

Sheldon met Evelyn's eyes with a feeling of triumph. She returned his gaze with a questioning lift of her eyebrows and when he bent over her hand, said, in a tone that he could not define, "So you joined the expedition against the Indians."

"Yes," he replied. "A useless expedition." He realized suddenly that Buford's eyes were on him, and turned hastily to bow to him and to Moore.

"You did not feel the expedition accomplished its purpose?" Buford asked.

"Not by any means, sir. Unfortunately, the Governor's compromise nullified our victory."

"You do not speak like a Loyalist," Evelyn remarked dryly.

Sheldon frowned at the sting in her words. Could peace between them be kept only by separation? "If loyalty depends upon my attachment to the Governor, I am not a Loyalist," he explained quietly.

"Here, we mustn't attack him like this!" Braxton laughed genially. "Come sit down and have a glass of Madeira, Sheldon. Then you can tell us what you consider the Governor's negligence."

Sheldon complied willingly. The wine warmed his blood after the long ride and he was glad to have time to collect his wits. He felt somehow as if he had been caught in a trap. There was not so much a feeling of dissension as of a tacit demand that he qualify his remarks, and yet he knew himself to be in the presence of only one real Loyalist, and that man, Mr. Bernard Moore, seemed just mildly curious. Sheldon wished for Will, with his brusque, outspoken opinion of Dunmore. And then he wondered if he were being tapped for information that would inflame the rebel cause. Well, no matter. He would tell them what they wanted to know, and more. There were countless other sources if he did not. He began cautiously, "I do not speak from personal opinion alone, sir. I express the opinions of many of my comrades when I say that Lord Dunmore could have spared us the loss of hundreds of men had he met us with his troops at Camp Point Pleasant. And I, for one, will never understand his eagerness to make peace with the Indians."

"That is not difficult to understand," Buford remarked, glancing meaningly at Braxton.

Sheldon saw the glance, heavy with implication. They have been arguing again, he thought, smiling inwardly at the long sustained battle between rebel and moderate.

"I don't doubt that you are a better judge of the war than we are, but possibly there are phases of it which you could not understand."

Braxton suggested hurriedly.

"I am sure we will hear from the Governor when he returns." Moore spoke for the first time.

And the Governor will hear of me, Sheldon thought, taking the chair Braxton brought forward for him. The thought gave him pleasure. He would enjoy being called to the Palace to account for his sentiments.

"Did you say there was much resentment in the army?" Buford asked, and it seemed to Sheldon that his question conveyed more than curiosity.

"There was a good deal, sir, in my company, and I understand it was the same in the others. The man who brought the news from the Pickaway Plains described the animosity among the men there as dangerously intense."

Buford nodded. "Very interesting in the light of the conversation we were having before you arrived. We were discussing Patrick Henry's Independent Company. Perhaps you have not yet heard of it."

"I have, sir," Sheldon said, but he would go no further. His opinion on that subject was reserved for Colonel Braxton.

"You were saying that you did not approve of it, Carter." Moore picked up the thread of their interrupted discussion.

Braxton nodded and pressed his finger-tips together. "It appears to me to indicate the beginning of armed resistance against authority. I fear that it can result in but one thing—republicanism, and I despise that. I cannot tolerate the thought that Virginia should be converted into a country of small, land-holding democrats with town meetings and psalm-singing Congregationalists."

Buford's thin figure stiffened and he uncrossed his legs to lean forward, emphasizing every word he spoke with a thrust of his head. He reminded Sheldon of a fighting cock in the pit. "Do you not think, Carter, that there is much in what Henry says—that we are foolish to wait until Great Britain has bound us hand and foot?"

Before Braxton could answer, Evelyn said impatiently, "The war is here, if one reads into the Suffolk Resolves the general spirit of the country. I, for one, do. And I hope that every young man in Hanover answers Mr. Henry's summons."

"And those outside Hanover?" Sheldon asked pointedly.

"Those, too, who are not faint-hearted," she answered, and the smile that brought warmth to her dark eyes, seemed for a moment to bridge the hostile gap between them.

It was late when the argument ended and Braxton's guests left him and Sheldon alone before the dying embers of the fire. For some moments they sat in silence, the only sounds in the house being the whistling of the wind and moaning of the trees.

In defending his judgment that peace ought to be maintained, Braxton's reasons were so intrenched in his own logic that it was difficult for him to give adequate expression to them without feeling that he stated the obvious. Was it not patently true that America was in a defenseless state, without a naval alliance, or a fleet of her own to protect her trade? And was not trade essential to the prosecution of war, when it should come? The Stamp Act and the Boston Port Bill were hard pills to swallow, and Parliament had made a heinous mistake in asserting its right to bind the colonies in all matters: a sort of delusive consolation after virtually being forced to repeal the Stamp Act. But surely, even those things did not warrant a severance of relations with England until all efforts at conciliation had failed. It began to look as if the eastern colonies did not want conciliation at any price. They seemed to prefer to fly with the storm than to take shelter until it had passed. Parliament would see the light of reason before long if, in the meantime, the colonies did not risk the loss of what independence they had. Yet, if war should come, he knew where he would place his loyalty. He would fight for the colonies as he had fought to support Patrick Henry's fight against the Stamp Act.

Braxton was first to break the silence.

"Well, Sheldon," he said, stretching his legs out to the warmth of the fire, "you are a seasoned veteran now. What do you think of warfare?" Seldom had his gray eyes sought more earnestly for a truthful answer.

"At present, sir, I am struck with the futility of it. I had no particular desire to fight for the sake of fighting when I joined the expedition. I thought I was helping to defend a cause I could understand. Perhaps the cause was not so straightforward as I imagined it, but it seemed to me that the colonists on the frontier settle-

ments were courageous and industrious and that they were trying to build up something for us against every kind of barbarity. Clen and I were horrified by the stories of Indian outrages. I don't know—I suppose the Indians were trying to keep what they thought belonged to them, but nothing could justify their cruelty. If they had fought against men, who were prepared for the odds—but they butchered women and children. It didn't matter so long as they spilled blood on every acre that was taken from them. It seemed a strong, fair fight when we went out there. And then Dunmore got frightened. Men said it on every side. He was either frightened or he had deliberately intended to bargain with the Indians. One of the men, Will McKee, said his agent, Conolly, had been buying up land from the Indians and had stirred them against the settlers. I believe every word of it."

"You must make allowance for growing sentiment against the Governor, Sheldon," Braxton warned, but he knew that his warning would fall on unsympathetic ears. He knew, too, as he spoke, that Sheldon was right. The Governor had never had the courage to face any issue. He had met every crisis with contempt, or bribery.

"The Governor, sir, be damned as far as I am concerned," Sheldon retorted. "I am against him and everything he stands for. And I could not fight, even for Virginia, while he was Governor. But supposing the Colony were divided, the people against the Governor. I could fight, then, with all my strength. And I think that such a fight is in Mr. Henry's mind. I came here to ask your opinion, sir." He rose from his chair and walked to the window. Braxton's words came to him like the sting of a whip.

"I know of Clen Montague's death, and what a friend he was to you, Sheldon, but don't let his loss confound your sense of justice."

"It isn't just that," Sheldon cried. He came back slowly to his chair. "It's the utter hypocrisy of the expedition. Half of us went out in good faith, prepared to die if we had to because we understood what we were fighting for. When Colonel Lewis was killed, we would have gone to any lengths to avenge him. And then we waited and waited for Dunmore to join us with the Northern division. He would have given us the strength necessary to end the battle in a few hours. But all that time he was planning his treaty with the Indians. He must assuage their anger—"

Braxton raised his hand. "That is over, Sheldon. You must forget it, now. You speak of Patrick Henry. Have you considered what his summons would lead to?"

"I think it would lead to an honest fight."

Braxton shook his head solemnly. "It will be son against father, brother against brother, friend against friend. I know. Eustice Buford is my friend, and yet he has no sympathy with my policy of caution, and uses words spoken in this house against me. He is for declaring independence now and taking the consequences. I cannot see Virginia prostrate before the leveling system of New England. The only advice I can give you is this: don't be led astray by Henry's rhetoric, nor by a desire for vengeance. Weigh the facts. Decide for yourself whether you think it is wiser to throw down the gauntlet or offer the olive branch once more."

"I am beginning to fear we have held out the olive branch too often. The Governor has no respect for Virginia."

"I don't think he does like the Colony, but I am not convinced yet that we will fail to find a peaceful settlement." Braxton took up the brass-handled roller and turned the logs till the bark sprang into flame. "That is my position," he finished.

"You do not think we would win a war against England, and you think the results would be too disastrous to risk it?" Sheldon ventured. "Perhaps we are not prepared, sir, because others have felt as you do."

"That is the substance of my opinion," Braxton admitted, "with one reservation. If we are offered the choice of groveling or fighting, I say we should fight with all our strength and ingenuity." He drew his fingers across his eyes and down his cheeks as if to rub the weariness from his face, then he rose from his chair with an effort. "I feel suddenly very tired, Sheldon. If you wish to sit here by the fire, I hope you will excuse me if I leave you."

"I'd like to sit here for a moment and think of what you have said. Yours is an opinion I very much wanted to have, sir."

"Tomorrow we will discuss it further," Braxton promised with a smile. "Sam will help you to undress if you need him. You must be careful of that arm. You may need it!"

He left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Where would it all lead? Sheldon began to wonder, knowing that

his father would have shared Braxton's calm logic. If the colonies did declare their independence and were forced to fight for it, was it possible that they could win a war against Great Britain when she could prolong the conflict as long as it suited her purpose; when the colonists would never be unanimous in their decision to oppose her; when she could draw upon a dozen times as many men as could be found to fight in all the colonies put together?

"May I come in?"

He swung out of his chair, his heart hammering. "You startled me, Evelyn. I thought you had retired."

"I did retire," she confessed, coloring at his slow smile. "I heard Colonel Braxton come upstairs alone, and I felt sure you were still here—making a momentous decision. Are you?"

"Evelyn, I believe you were listening!"

"The door was closed, and unfortunately, it is very heavy," she replied, fixing him with a mischievous glance.

"Then you tried to listen!"

"I tried, but I gave it up," she laughed.

"I always thought you had no shame," he said.

"Why do you say that?" she asked. The question came with casual curiosity as she settled herself in the chair opposite his, smoothing the long folds of her embroidered skirt. His eyes followed the movement of her hands. She didn't care what he meant or why he had said it, and her deliberate unconcern infuriated him. Once she had made him feel that she loved him, or perhaps he had confused love and pity for there had been no love in her greeting this time. He looked at her with steady wonder. She would never change. And then he realized, for the first time, that she was beautiful and that a part of that beauty was in her strange, unbridled spirit. If he had been asked to describe a beautiful woman by conventional standards he would have described her eyes and the shape of her face, the slender, confident figure. But there he would have ended, because he could not have described Evelyn's expression, the tilt of her head at this moment, the exquisite, tapering hands. Nor could he have explained the quality of her voice, its soft inflection and the subtly exciting tone of it. He wondered suddenly, and a bit alarmed, if she were reading his mind, for in her eyes he thought he

saw a new light, warmly sympathetic. He felt strangely moved when he answered her question. "I did not really mean that, Evelyn. You seem to be able to make me say things I regret as soon as I've said them." He spread his hands in a gesture of appeal. "I don't think I understand you. The rare moments when I think I do always baffle me!"

"Is it because I am so unlike most women?" she asked with unself-conscious candor.

"Do you feel that you are?" he countered.

"I think so. I despise the things that they like—their tea parties and gossip. I'd far rather listen to my father and Colonel Braxton argue all night than sit with the ladies after dinner. The banality of their conversation is exhausting."

"That is no fault," he said, and felt a hot uneasiness when he remembered how often he had questioned that very right.

"I do not believe you really mean that." She rose and moved to the hearth, but her eyes on his compelled an answer.

"Your interest in political affairs surprises me, Evelyn. That is all. You must admit it is unusual."

"Perhaps." She withdrew her gaze and turned toward the fire. With scarcely a thought for what he did, he went to her, and putting his hand on her arm, forced her to face him. "We can be friends now?" he pleaded.

Her eyebrows, tapering upward, her eyes so dark that the point of light in each was like the sparkling facet of a diamond, the quizzical expression on her lips—he saw them all through a mist of quick desire. He had been conscious of no compelling urge to touch her and yet the warm, silken smoothness of her skin had set him afire. He let his hand drop and stood before her, bewildered.

He did not understand that Evelyn's silence grew out of the same bewilderment: that his clear, green eyes and the angular lines of his face had become tormentingly exciting to her; that where before she had seen in his firm chin a disagreeable obstinacy, she saw now only strength and courage. Neither of them spoke but their senses encircled each other in wild tumult. Try as he would, he could not take his eyes from her face. He must have been blind not to see in it before the things that he saw there now. She must think him a fool to stand before her like this, without speaking, but her eyes

were strangely warm and uncritical. There were words on her lips; he could see them forming and he waited, breathless, to hear them.

"Perhaps we might," she repeated, "if you did not love me, Sheldon, and if I did not love you." She put her hands on his face and smiled because his expression of incredulous joy was almost pathetic.

He moved so close to her that he knew she could feel him trembling. "They say that hate and love are akin," he said breathlessly. "I must have loved you from the first day I saw you, and perhaps you loved me when you were mocking me."

"I did," she whispered, stirring as she felt his lips on her hair. "Oh, darling! That day in Chericoke woods, I was so frightened for you, and you wouldn't let me touch you. I had to stand there and see you suffer when I wanted to comfort you in my arms. When you got up and you were all right, I could have cried, and all you said was that you would always be here to fight with me. I thought you knew, then."

"I think I did." He held her face in the palm of his hand and for a moment watched the candlelight play in her eyes. He put his lips on hers and felt them part, drawing him with her into the hot and dizzying pool. Thus they stood, encircled in each other's arms until the great clock in the corner of the room struck midnight. Then the pressure of their lips grew lighter and she moved slowly away from him, watching his face. His eyes clung to her through a hot mist and his breath came quickly. "Evelyn! Evelyn!" His words were a whispered longing.

"I know, darling." She put her hands on the mantel and rested her head against them. When he moved to her side, slipping his arm about her, she didn't stir. Only the quickened beating of her heart responded.

"You will marry me, Evelyn. Say it!"

She turned to face him with such suddenness that he withdrew his hand, studying her with a puzzled frown. "Don't you think I have thought of it, Sheldon? But I am afraid. There are so many things that might fall between us, so many differences to be fought over!"

"Tell me what they are," he urged.

"How can I, now!" she cried. "Your nearness confuses me so."

He took her hand with a gentle, reassuring pressure. "I believe we want the same thing, Evelyn. Perhaps we are striving for it in different ways."

"And what is that?"

"Peace and growth. Freedom from this eternal confusion and conflict."

"Yes," she whispered. "If we had those things we could be happy. But we haven't got them. I don't think we will ever have them."

"That isn't true, Evelyn. There are many of us to fight for them."

She turned back toward the fire, watching the feeble flames lick the charred log. "We had best wait," she said and the misery in her voice left him powerless to reply.

4

THE stamping of restless hooves on hard ground woke Sheldon from a confusing dream in which he and Evelyn had been groping through endless, tangled forests driven by a figure strangely resembling the Royal Governor. He sat up in bed, trying to bring his muddled brain back to reality, and then he sensed that something was amiss. The French clock on the mantelpiece facing his bed told him that it was too early for people to be stirring in the house. Unless his sleep-swollen eyes deceived him, the hands pointed to five. A cold shiver raced up his spine as he threw back the bed-clothes and went to the window overlooking the circular drive. Eustice Buford's coach stood below, its lacquered body dull in the first gray light of dawn. The sleepy coachman held the reins in lax ebony fingers. As yet there was no sign of Buford or Evelyn, but suddenly, as he watched, the coachman drew himself erect and gathered up the reins in both hands.

Sheldon watched with alarm. Surely Evelyn couldn't be leaving him like this, without a word of farewell. Was it possible that she had deliberately made a fool of him as a parting gesture of scorn? No! He might be unequal to her changeable moods but he was not blind and without feeling, and Evelyn, in his arms, loved him. He

remembered with a frantic pang the soft acquiescence of her mouth and her body too close to his, too responsive to his longing to be as meaningless as this!

He turned, in a heat of desperation, from the window and reached for his clothes. Folding his cravat with trembling fingers, he rushed to the door. For an instant he paused, then returned to the chair where he had carelessly tossed his coat the night before. He couldn't face her, ill-groomed, in his shirt sleeves, and let her see his frenzied bewilderment. If it had been a game to her, he would not let her see how effectively she had played it. He must go down casually to tell her goodbye. He would see in her eyes whether she had known all along that this was to be her escape.

As he slipped into his coat, he heard the coach move off. Running to the window, he saw her lean forward and wave. The bays broke into a trot under the flick of the whip and swung around the circle. For a moment he stood motionless, watching the coach bump over the weather-beaten road. The muscles in his jaws hardened, and his eyes strained to follow its lacquered body around the bend. Weak, shaming tears sprang into his eyes. He brushed them away angrily and began to smile. The smile was still on his face when he walked over to the mirror above the serpentine chest. He remembered standing before this same chest and mirror after the first time he had met Evelyn at Chericoke, looking long and critically at his face to detect the reason for her contempt. He had wondered then if it was because his face betrayed every thought, every emotion, just as it now betrayed his misery and humiliation. There was nothing secretive or unpredictable in the angular contour of his features or in his steady, wide-spaced eyes. What Evelyn had ever found in him that was weak, he could not see in the square of glass.

I'm too obvious, he told his reflection. Too damned obvious. But when he turned from the mirror and crossed the room to the door a surge of futile hurt swept over him. It was useless to try to explain Evelyn through his faults. There was some other reason why she had left him so abruptly, and he was going to find out what it was. All that returned to him now of their conversation was the reply she had made to his question of joining the Hanover Volunteers. "Those, too, who are not faint-hearted," she had said. Was this what she had thought of last night after they had parted? Could she

really believe that he was afraid? Well, he knew how to answer her. He would join the Hanover Volunteers. With that issue settled, he would go in search of her.

Carter Braxton lay restless in his bed. He had tried to go back to sleep after the Bufords' sudden departure, but the message, brought by a courier riding hard through the night, which had galvanized Eustice into such precipitate action disturbed him. Eustice had only hinted at it, but he had told Braxton enough for him to know that resistance to the Crown was being hurriedly organized and that Eustice had an important part in the plans. Long before there had been any talk of rebellion, he had advocated separation. He had seen the fringe of the western country and was convinced that England could never subdue it. Only the colonists, inured to hardship, could hold it against primitive aggression and push on even farther through the wilderness to that strange and rich new land called Kentucky. He considered the colonies strung out along the eastern seaboard as the birthright of those who had been born within their boundaries, and in the struggle that was coming for this right he maintained there was no place for worn-out Georgian methods of subjugation. Eustice was too old to fight, but he was not too old to think, to connive, to try his wits.

In a fever of impatience, Braxton decided that the morning air would do him more good than sleep. He rose, ordered hot water and shaved himself. When he was disturbed, he had no patience with the ministrations of his body-servant. A last-minute brushing of his country coat was the only service the disgruntled negro was allowed to perform.

The house was gloomy in the thin morning light as he walked through the hall and down the stairs. Brisk air was what he needed, a walk through the garden and the fields to the river. He surprised Sheldon, coming up behind him at the dock.

"You are out early."

Sheldon turned swiftly to face him. "You startled me, sir. Yes. I couldn't sleep."

"Nor could I."

"I heard the Bufords leave." Sheldon wanted to ask if Evelyn had left any word for him, but Braxton went on, "Eustice had a

message that called him away."

Sheldon was swept by a wave of relief. So that was it. Evelyn had had no choice but to go with her father. Perhaps she had protested against leaving. A smile rose to his lips.

Braxton looked quizzically at him.

"I am going to marry Evelyn," Sheldon told him.

Braxton's brows flew up. "Marry her?"

"Does that seem strange to you, sir?"

"Strange? No, not that. But have you thought what it will mean? You will be drawn into the midst of the most rebellious movement afoot. You will have no chance to consider and judge—"

"I don't intend to marry Mr. Buford's political opinion."

"You will never have his permission unless you do."

"Then I won't ask him for it. In any case I am going to join the Hanover Volunteers. That should satisfy him."

Braxton's expression hardened and Sheldon could feel his disapproval like a physical force. He stiffened against it but his eyes pleaded for understanding. "I have thought of it every way. If we don't make a serious stand—"

"You and Buford will be friends," Braxton interrupted.

"You don't mean that *we* will not!" Sheldon cried.

Braxton patted him gently on the arm. "I fear that we will be political enemies, but that is all. I think our friendship can weather the storm."

"Evelyn has not yet said she will marry me," Sheldon confessed. "She knows I do not share her radical opinions, that I am trying to find my way cautiously. Perhaps that is the reason." He paused. "You said that you yourself would be for fighting if war were the only solution. A standing militia might prevent war."

"Never. It will be as provocative as the Sons of Liberty, and Eustice will have you carrying their banner, too."

Sheldon smiled wryly. "I don't think I am that easily persuaded."

"And I don't think that Evelyn will marry you until you are." Braxton's retort went home, stinging Sheldon into silence as they walked back along the dock.

THE BUFORDS' coach rolled roughly along the Richmond road. Eustice Buford was in high spirits as he always was when there was a scheme afoot, and this scheme was one to his complete liking. If war should come, the Loyalists would be a formidable body, giving aid and information to the King's men. Massachusetts and New York had found a way to hunt out the most rabid of these Loyalists and Virginia could adopt the same methods. It was merely a matter of organization. Since Patrick Henry's resolutions against the Stamp Act had inspired the formation of the first society of the Sons of Liberty in Boston nine years ago, they had grown to amazing strength. Even before the Continental Congress had been proposed in Williamsburg, they had suggested it to the Providence, New York and Philadelphia Committees of Correspondence. The Sons of Liberty were not a fanatical set of vandals as some maintained. Their only desire was to checkmate those who would assist England to subdue the colonies.

Eustice turned his eyes from the green and wooded countryside and looked quizzically at Evelyn. She had not spoken since they had left Chericoke behind them and now that he noticed it, he was puzzled by her silence. He had no more knowledge of her inner thoughts than a stranger had. To anyone less ignorant of feminine emotion than Eustice, it would have been plain that Evelyn was unhappy, and that the cause of her unhappiness had to do with her heart. But if Evelyn had told him, he would not have understood. The only thing about her which he could understand—that thing which baffled their friends—was the intensity of her interest in the affairs of the colonies. At first, he had discussed them with her because it was easier to think aloud, and then he had become aware of the reasonableness of her criticism and suggestions, her sure, intuitive predictions of Loyalist reaction to his decisions. Finally, he grew so accustomed to discussing his problems with her as man to man, and getting a masculine point of view in return, that it had never occurred to him she might be vulnerable to a man's physical charms. If anyone had hazarded the assumption that she would some day marry and leave him, he would have glowered at that person and told him not to be a fool. So now he stared at

his daughter uncomprehendingly, wondering how he could possibly have offended her. Uncertainty irked him and provoked his worst humor.

"Why are you so silent?" he snapped.

Evelyn started as if stung. "I am thinking of what a fool I am, Father."

"Fool? Why?" he demanded.

"I couldn't explain to you if I tried all the way from here to Petersburg."

"Do you think I am incapable of understanding?" There was defiance in his voice and a tone of hurt which she thought he threw in to shame her.

"No—" She paused. "I am incapable of explaining."

Eustice let the subject drop. He disliked anything but plain facts.

The journey from Richmond to Petersburg ended in a stiffly blowing wind, cold enough to turn the breath to fog. Even Stepney, the coachman, who was hardened to the weather, seemed to withdraw into his greatcoat.

Eustice and Evelyn hurried into the house and sought the warmth of the parlor. They stood before the fire, rubbing their hands, letting the delicious heat set their skin aglow before they removed their cloaks.

"Albert! Where's my toddy?" Eustice bellowed.

"I'se comin', I'se comin'," Albert called petulantly. "A gempmun come to see yo'all an' Ah gives him sumpin' ter eat in de kitchen."

Eustice knew that Francis Foutré had arrived looking like a vagrant. Nevertheless, he could not tolerate Albert's presumptuousness in silence.

"Show him in here at once, you black numbskull," he thundered, "and remember that my guests are not entertained in the kitchen."

Francis Foutré entered the room in saddle-stained buckskin breeches and faded yellow fringed hunting shirt. His face did not appear to have been shaved in the last twenty-four hours, and obviously only the mildest attempt had been made to wash away the dirt of his journey, for sweat-streaked dust still coated his skin. Foutré was a stocky man, his hard-muscled figure above average height. Evelyn, studying him with curiosity, decided that he must be in his thirties and that most of those years must have been lived

in almost continual hazard, for his movements were quick, nervous and wary.

"I found a courier in Leedstown willing to take my message to you," he explained, pacing from the window to the fireplace before he would accept the chair Eustice had drawn up for him.

Eustice scowled. "Colonel Braxton's valet crept into my room at four-thirty with it. Is it so urgent that you could not have waited till a more respectable hour? I don't like arousing curiosity to such an extent."

"It's very urgent. I must be in Norfolk by morning." Foutré sank into the chair and shut his eyes. Evelyn noticed that the firelight flecked the graying hairs around his forehead, and that his face in repose looked desperately tired.

"Can't you rest the night here?" she asked, and he opened his eyes slowly, struck by her solicitude.

"I fear not," he replied. His eyes lingered curiously on her face. "They're stirring up trouble down there. Matthew Phripp is suspected of breaking the Association, and the Sons of Liberty are after him. We want to persuade them not to act precipitately. But I am here for another purpose."

Evelyn rose quickly. "I am sure you wish to speak in private." She would have gone from the room, but Foutré's answer brought her back to her chair.

"Pray do not leave us. What I have to say may concern you and I would rather that you hear it."

"Concern me?" she echoed, perplexed.

"It may," he repeated. His eyes held hers in an appraising glance, almost bold, were it not for the subject of their conversation.

She sat down again, eager to hear what he had to say. Foutré addressed Eustice, but his eyes kept coming back to Evelyn. She wished that she could read them as plainly as she could read Sheldon's, but they remained inscrutable.

"The time is coming shortly, Mr. Buford, when the Sons of Liberty may need friends," he said in an urgent, low-pitched voice. "While we feel confident that if war comes it will be the Loyalists who run like rats, we cannot overlook the possibility that there may be a period of time when certain members of the Sons of Liberty will be forced to seek cover. I have been instructed to inquire if you

will allow your house to be used for that purpose."

Eustice's solemn expression grew sharply calculating. He was willing to give cover to anyone defending the cause of liberty, but the possible consequences for Evelyn, if he should be caught giving cover to the King's enemies, disturbed him deeply. He replied reservedly, "My life, as you know, is dedicated to the cause, but I cannot agree to anything that will put my daughter in a hazardous position."

Foutré nodded. "I am in complete sympathy with you on that point. I wouldn't be willing to ask a service that would jeopardize your daughter's safety. On the other hand, her uncommon interest in the cause is well-known to us, and even now there is a place for noble spirited ladies. They who are the least open to suspicion are the very ones to mark the danger points for us. I only state the obvious when I say that Miss Buford's acquaintances must cover a wide field, and that there are few such women one would be willing to entrust with any mission where the fate of the colonies might be concerned." Foutré turned again to Evelyn and his eyes, burning with their hot, searching light, held hers in fascinated attention.

"It was my hope," he continued, "that Miss Buford might have a friend in Williamsburg whom she could visit in the beginning of the year. It would not require much time for her to discover which of the lesser-known Loyalists were planning active support of the Governor in the event of hostilities. An indiscreet word, spoken in an unguarded moment—"

Evelyn raised her eyes sharply. She had recovered her composure. "You are asking me to be a spy?"

Foutré nodded. "That is what it amounts to."

Eustice, shaking himself out of speechless incredulity, cried in a voice so menacing that Foutré stiffened, "What you propose, sir, is preposterous! Did I understand you to say, a moment ago, that you would not be willing to jeopardize my daughter's safety?"

"You did, and I repeat it. If Miss Buford follows my suggestion, she will be out of Petersburg when we need your assistance, and there will be no danger in passing on her information to us. I will personally guarantee that."

"Would you be interested to know what I think of your suggestion?" Evelyn asked quietly.

Foutré threw a quick glance at Eustice and began to finger the fringe of his hunting shirt.

"You speak of danger," Evelyn went on, "as if I feared it. Well, I do not. You know my sentiments regarding the colonies. They are not mere words, spoken idly. They are my life's blood and have been since I was old enough to know right from wrong. That is why I am thankful for the opportunity to do something useful. I shall go to Williamsburg in the new year." Her face was aglow with excitement.

The look she turned on Foutré was steady and resolute. "You will let me know what I am to do?"

Eustice exploded. "You do not know what you are saying, Evelyn. Stubborn as you are, I will not allow you to defy me this time. You are not going to Williamsburg, and you will confine your interest in politics to the expression of your opinion. Most of my friends think I am mad to encourage you in that!"

"Expression of my opinion!" she repeated, hotly. "Pray tell me, Father, what good will that do anyone!"

"It will keep you out of trouble, where you belong," Eustice thundered. Then he turned on Foutré. "You started this, sir. I would thank you to finish it!"

Foutré rose from his chair and walked to the fireplace, with a feeling of utter futility. He had not bargained for such a scene. He had been warned that Buford was quick-tempered, but he had also been told that he was an uncompromising patriot. He should have realized, though, that patriotism rarely survived in uncompromising form when it touched home. His face was drawn and his eyes heavy with weariness when he finally turned to face Eustice. "I am sorry, sir. I did not think you would take this view of the matter, but I understand. You are right, and Miss Buford must think no more of it."

"Do you always make and dismiss your suggestions as lightly as that, Mr. Foutré?" Evelyn retorted.

Foutré was silent, but his eyes came back to her, brightening with hope. "I would not put any lady in danger, much less one as charming as yourself."

"Pretty words!" she cried. "But they are too late. You said yourself that there was no danger. Let that relieve your mind of appre-

hension. As for myself, I have told you that I do not care whether there is danger or not. And you, Father"—she turned on Eustice—"should not preach fear. You have always courted trouble."

"I am a man," Eustice spluttered.

"And, of course, that makes all the difference in the world," she laughed scornfully. "I know—a woman should be a mousy little thing, but you would hate me if I were, Father, and I would not blame you. If I feel impelled to follow Mr. Foutré's suggestion it is because you have taught me to defend my convictions and not to fear the consequences."

"And if I gave you a little more rope you would hang yourself," Eustice retorted. "No, I demand that you obey me, and if you will leave us till suppertime, I shall be obliged."

Her eyes danced with anger in her pale face and her mouth tightened until it was a shapeless red line.

She stormed out of the parlor, and swooping up the folds of her skirt, ran up the stairs to her room. For a long time she stood before the window watching the silver leaves whipped by the wind from the great beech in the front garden. The thought that her father had humiliated her ran incessantly through her mind.

Finally, trembling with anger, she sat down at her desk, picked up the quill and wrote:

Dear Sir,

Please do not allow my father's foolish apprehension to destroy an opportunity I have long awaited to serve our cause. I will pay a visit in January to my friend, Mrs. Emeline Cooper, who lives near The Sign of the King's Arms in Williamsburg. I shall hope for you to communicate your wishes to me there.

Evelyn Buford.

She sanded the letter and re-read it, then rang for Mammy. It was several minutes before the old slave shuffled into the room in answer to the summons. Age and toil had drawn Mammy as fine as a leafless willow and thinned her close-cropped gray hair but they had not destroyed the keenness of her intuition where Evelyn was concerned. She knew every shading of her moods and reflected them with toothless smile or sullen pout. She could be trusted to keep any errand secret and to bind any of the other slaves to secrecy

with threats of such dire vengeance that their superstitious natures recoiled.

Evelyn held out the letter to Mammy with the clear, cold sense of having made a decision from which there was no retreat. "Tell Albert to give this to Mr. Foutré when he leaves, and to be sure that my father doesn't see him do it. If necessary, tell Albert to slip it into his saddle-bag. It's very, very important."

Mammy took the letter and stuffed it into the hollow between her pendulous breasts. "Mars Eustice bin upsettin' my chile agin?" she asked soothingly.

"Father's stubborn. Just as stubborn as he can be." Evelyn walked with quick, nervous steps to the window.

"Yo'all oughta git married, Miss Evelyn. Then yuh could live in y'own house and do's yo'all pleased."

"Go take the note, Mammy. I want to be by myself."

Mammy withdrew, mumbling black protests, but the look she cast at Evelyn before she shut the door was warm with loyal understanding.

Evelyn did her best to avoid Foutré's eyes during supper, but he continually addressed her, hoping, she supposed, to convince her that he had not been unfavorably impressed by the scene with her father. He seemed refreshed by Albert's strong toddies, and gave them an animated account of his journey from New York. Evelyn was glad when he had gone. She thought she would never forget his eyes—the way they had searched hers with such calculating boldness.

From her open window she watched him mount his horse in the light from the doorway, saw his long back straighten as he gathered up the reins and spurred his horse out of the dim square of light. Then his figure was swallowed up by the darkness, but she remained at the window, listening to the diminishing beat of his horse's hooves on the hard-packed road. He had taken a restless, stimulating vitality with him, leaving her tired and a little bewildered. When she crept into bed, she was asleep before Mammy had finished putting her clothes in order.

SHELDON returned to Bellevue in the autumn in a final effort to make his peace with Aunt Florrie.

When he walked into the bar at Weedon's Tavern in Fredericksburg, he found Will McKee discussing the value of his pelts with a large, florid-faced man who did not appear to be in the best of humor.

"I tell you, sir, you won't find cleaner pelts than these anywhere. Not a scar on 'em. If you find one, sir, I'll stand you a bottle of Weedon's best rum." Will jabbed the pelts with his finger.

"I still say you ask too much for them," the man protested.

"Then you don't need to take 'em." Will put down his glass. His eye fell on Sheldon and a smile of pleasure sprang to his lips. He made the merchant a disdainful bow.

"Servant, sir," he mumbled and turned to Sheldon, who seized his hand and shook it heartily.

"Will, this is monstrous good luck! I was beginning to think you'd forgotten your promise."

"You mean to come back here?" Will questioned and then he laughed. "Do *you* remember what you said? That the gentry buy as well as anyone else? Well, God's teeth, they'll sure have to support me if that's a sample of your Fredericksburg merchant!" He nodded toward his prospective customer and winked slowly.

"Forget that! I've much to talk to you about."

The merchant tapped Will's shoulder. "I'll take them and be robbed," he grumbled.

Will laughed. "Don't forget, I like to be paid in hard sterling."

"That's your work for the day, Will. You're coming to Bellevue with me."

"Not for long. I've got land in Augusta to tend." Will scratched the back of his head. "Reckon Tom's gettin' tired of waitin' for me."

"Who in the devil is Tom?" Sheldon took his arm and led him toward the door.

"Nephew. Likely lad, too. I don't see much of him, as things are, or my land either, for that matter. But I guess they'll bury me in Augusta."

"I don't think you'll be going back when you hear what's in my

mind," Sheldon told him, and before he could reply, he stepped to the bar. "Will it be rum, Will? You'll get none from Aunt Florrie."

They took their drinks slowly, watching each other over their noggins in a silent toast to their meeting.

"Well, what's your news?" Will asked as they started out along the road to Bellevue.

"It's good news, this time," Sheldon told him, letting the reins fall loosely on Nero's withers. "Mr. Henry has formed an Independent Company, and he's at Scotchtown now. He wants volunteers and I don't doubt he'd accept us. We've had more experience than most of the militia, especially you, and I don't think we'd have any difficulty proving our hearts are on the right side."

Will seemed to come suddenly to life. "The militiamen are poor fighters compared to what we're used to. Most of 'em aren't trained and there's not a decent firearm among the lot of 'em."

Sheldon warmed to his subject under Will's encouragement. "They'll be equipped. You can be sure of that if Patrick Henry has anything to say. And they'll be trained, too."

"I'm spoilin' for a good fight," Will confessed.

"Then you're with me!" Sheldon cried, and a broad smile of relief crossed his face. "I have a feeling there'll be plenty of fighting before we're through, Will. The trouble was just beginning at Point Pleasant."

"I have one bit of news you may not have heard yet," Will told him with a sudden sparkle of humor in his eyes. "I picked it up at Weedon's."

"What's that?"

"I heard down Norfolk way when the *Virginia* arrived in York River with two half chests o' tea, a crowd of the leading citizens boarded her and over the rail went the tea."

Sheldon couldn't help laughing. "Inspired by the brave Bostonians, I'm sure. What happened?"

"What happened? Why the tea just gurgled down to the bottom o' the river."

"I know that, Will! What happened to the people?"

"Nothin', yet. They just went ashore, claimin' they'd done the ship no damage. There's a rumor that Captain Esten's been ordered to get out with his ship in twenty days." Will looked thoroughly

satisfied at having imparted news of interest.

"Who'd you hear that from?" Sheldon asked.

"Some fellow ridin' to Philadelphia like a scalded cat. Just stopped for a tot o' rum."

Sheldon rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "That kind of thing's apt to be the last straw. Gage bombarding Boston and fortifying the neck—how can anyone expect conciliation after that? And then there's the Articles of Association coming into effect in December."

"What's that?" Will asked, unwilling to admit to himself that anything he hadn't heard of could bear much importance.

"Resolutions passed by the Congress at Philadelphia to stop all imports in December, and all exports on the tenth of September, next year. It means if Aunt Florrie can't sell her leaf here, her crop is dead loss. You can see how the Loyalists will scream against the iniquities perpetrated by the patriots!"

"Won't that ruin the colonies?"

"Not nearly as fast as Parliament's taxes. It's the main weapon we have with which to beat England."

Will nodded, but he was still puzzled. The only weapons he understood were the rifle and the tomahawk.

Miss Florrie shuddered as Will took a seat in her frailest Chippendale chair. Sheldon should have prepared her for this strange, lanky, up-country guest with the dreadful scar. Her eyes had run swiftly over his buckskin clothes and hard-boned hands while he was bowing solemnly to her, and then they had turned with a guarded question to Sheldon, as she had invited Will to be seated. Sheldon smiled. It was obvious that Miss Florrie thought Will's manners as rough as his clothes because he did not present a stockinged leg and was clearly ill at ease among her fragile furniture and innumerable Dresden figures.

"I don't think you understand, Aunt Florrie, that Will is the Ranger who educated me in the art of warfare at Point Pleasant," Sheldon hinted broadly, wishing that he had found Miss Florrie in more amiable humor.

"Oh, indeed." She gave Will one of her rare, gracious smiles. "I have you to thank then, Mr. McKee, that he returned alive. I know of your journey back."

Will lowered his eyes and shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "He is strong, ma'am. I reckon he would have survived without me."

"Your care must have speeded his recovery. He was able to leave Bellevue very soon after his arrival."

"Aunt Florrie, I was here for weeks!" Sheldon protested. This, then, was the reason for her ill-humor. She felt neglected, but she always would until he consented to live permanently at Bellevue.

"No matter. An old lady is not a very stimulating companion for a young man." She turned to Will with an expression that seemed to ask for confirmation, but he avoided her eyes and began to pick sedulously at the fringe on his jacket.

"What revolutionary ideas did Mr. Braxton fill you with, Sheldon?" She smiled as if she had uttered a jest, but Sheldon felt the sting of her words. It startled him when Will replied, glancing up suddenly.

"Revolutionary ideas are abroad in every colony, Miss Hilliard—even in the western lands."

"Are you in sympathy with them?" she asked suspiciously.

"Aye, that I am," he answered fervently. "And I reckon Sheldon is, too, from what he said after the Point Pleasant campaign."

Sheldon could have throttled him. He hadn't meant to bring the matter so precipitately to a head, but it was too late now. Miss Florrie was on her feet, facing Will with eyes ablaze. "Mr. McKee, you are in the house of a Loyalist, and I will beg you to remember it. I will thank you, too, not to encourage Sheldon's deluded sentiments regarding the Governor and the King."

Will's eyes accepted her fiery challenge. He was no longer intimidated by Miss Florrie, Sheldon saw with mounting alarm. Sure of his ground, he would stand up to her till the bitter end of the argument. "The Governor betrayed us, ma'am. We owe him no loyalty."

"Betrayed you, the King's subjects? You are mad!"

"That he did!" Will repeated, heatedly. "As surely as if he'd fought on the side of the Indians."

"Aunt Florrie—Will—for the love of Heaven, let's not discuss that," Sheldon cried.

"I've no mind to discuss it," Miss Florrie said, and excusing

herself, left the room, her skirts rustling angrily about her.

Will watched her go, his face hard as flint.

Sheldon sighed deeply and threw himself onto the sofa. "God's teeth, Will. Why did you bring that up?"

"Because I think it!"

"I do, too, but it's no good trying to convince a Loyalist that you're right."

Slowly Will shook his head. "I reckon I shouldn't have argued with your aunt, but I was thinkin' of Clen and the others who died out there. Beggin' your pardon, your aunt knows nothin' of that."

"You're right, Will. But Aunt Florrie will never admit it."

"This is no place for me, feelin' the way I do." Will made a move to rise.

"Don't go. That would be a mistake. Aunt Florrie will think she's won the argument." He grinned persuasively.

Suddenly he got up from the sofa. "Come along, Will. I will show you the worst scoundrel in Virginia—Aunt Florrie's esteemed overseer."

As they went out the door, Cappy handed him a letter. "Come by de post from Hanover way, day after you'all left. I bin savin' it fo' yuh."

"That's right, Cappy." Sheldon laughed. "I don't know why Miss Florrie always finds my correspondence so much more interesting than her own." He took the letter and stuffed it into his coat pocket.

"Ain't yuh gonna read it?" Cappy mumbled, knowing that a letter Sheldon put in his pocket was apt to be forgotten for days.

"In due time, Cappy. I've more important business just now."

With Collin, they rode over the broad acres of Bellevue, skirting stands of brown, brittle cornstalks and fields of new grass. The plantation, extending from the bluff above the Rappahannock back to the Fredericksburg road, was one of the richest pieces of land in Spottsylvania. Looking at the fertile land, Sheldon wondered how many pounds in good sterling Collin had taken out of it since he had gone to the Indian war. The thought angered him, and he turned abruptly to the overseer.

"I would like to see your books within the next few days."

"Miss Hilliard has just inspected them," Collin replied in a tone

that struck Will as being close to insolent.

"But I have not," Sheldon answered, keeping a grip on his temper.

"They are ready for you anytime." Suddenly Collin's close-set eyes were disarmingly good-humored.

"I presume you understand the significance of the Articles of Association?"

Collin nodded. "I do, and have provided accordingly. Mr. Robertson has the promise of some of our crop at thirteen shillings per hundred. When the Association comes into effect, there is still the Boston and West Indian trade."

"That depends upon your orders," Sheldon reminded him sternly, "and you are taking those orders from Miss Hilliard, Collin."

Will pulled his horse behind the two men. He had no wish to get mixed up in this affair, and if he rode beside them any longer, looking at Collin's insolent, fat face, he might be tempted to flatten it with his fist. He gave a quick sigh of relief when Sheldon turned back to the house.

Miss Florrie had returned to the drawing-room, and for once Sheldon was glad that her disposition was so mercurial. She smiled at Will as though the argument had never occurred and was altogether so pleasant-tempered that Sheldon suspected she was going to try gentle persuasion on him.

"You have seen Collin?" she asked, without the usual implication that it was no business of his.

"Yes, Aunt Florrie. And as I've said before, a greater scoundrel never lived. I hope his manners toward you are more civil than they are toward me."

"He is quite amiable."

Sheldon grunted impatiently. "It is wise of him to cheat you with a smile."

Miss Florrie dismissed his comment with a toss of her head but her face grew serious. "I've heard that the Congress has passed resolutions which may affect the planters, Sheldon. Will this apply to Bellevue?"

He nodded. "When I told you of the Articles the last time I was here, you treated it very lightly, Aunt Florrie. Of course, they will affect Bellevue. The English will have to do without your tobacco."

"What will they think of next!" she sighed.

"War comes next," he replied soberly, "unless Parliament realizes that it can bluff the colonies no longer."

"Bluff the colonies!" she cried in rising indignation. "England is trying to deal with unruly children, and I don't envy her the task. Why cannot these affairs of state be settled between gentlemen!"

"There are great gentlemen among the Burgesses and in the Congress at Philadelphia," Sheldon reminded her.

Will said softly, "That's true," and Miss Florrie's eyes flew to him.

"That may be, but it is the rebels who rule." She directed her words at him in a cold and level tone, then turned on Sheldon. "And I wish you would explain to me why the colonies think England will suffer any more than they by these absurd resolutions they have passed."

He leaned forward in his chair, folding his hands between his knees. "I can't explain anything to you, Aunt Florrie, when you act as if I am the incarnation of all rebels. Don't you understand that I am only trying to protect you when I tell you these things? You are fighting a strong tide. I don't want to see you pulled under. It's more serious than you realize."

She looked at him steadily without replying.

"Our merchants have warning," he went on. "They will be prepared to counteract the ills of the Association, whereas England will not. She does not take our threats seriously."

"Our? Do you include yourself!"

"Oh, Aunt Florrie, the Congress, then." He buried his face in his hands.

"Go on," she invited in a tone of sarcasm that brought an exasperated grunt from Will.

Sheldon leaned back in his chair. "Colonel Braxton says that if war comes, there will be a serious shortage of arms all over the country. But the men who drafted the resolutions feel—so it's said—that total cessation of commerce will cause such a stagnation of trade and loss of revenue for Great Britain that general bankruptcy could only be averted by the Government's acceding to the demands of the colonies. They're pinning their hopes to that. Colonel Braxton says he can't see Parliament succumbing to any such coercion."

"Colonel Braxton, for once, is quite right," Miss Florrie announced indignantly.

Sheldon threw a quick glance at Will. He didn't like to cause him further uneasiness by bringing up another subject disagreeable to Miss Florrie, but this seemed the best time to tell her that he intended to join the Hanover Volunteers. He got up from his chair and went to the fireplace. It was easier to talk standing up.

"I've made up my mind about enlisting in the militia," he said with all the firmness he could command.

Miss Florrie looked squarely at him, then lowered her eyes, but in that brief moment he saw that her expression held none of its familiar reproachfulness. There was in its place disbelief and confusion that made him feel he had dealt her a physical blow. She said, in an odd voice, "I hoped Colonel Braxton would advise you against that."

"He told me to use my own judgment."

"You are prepared to take the consequences?" she asked.

Will went quickly to the window and tried to fasten his attention on the far shore. He wished he were back at Weedon's where you could talk about these things without acting as though somebody were dying.

"Entirely," Sheldon replied. He longed, suddenly, to get out of the house. Having admitted his intention, he found the atmosphere curiously restraining.

"Well," Miss Florrie said, her eyes confronting him bitterly, "it's painful for me to say it, but I cannot suffer a rebel in my house. If you join Mr. Henry's volunteers, you must live elsewhere. It would be hypocrisy to have you here."

"Aunt Florrie!" Sheldon cried. "Don't make it so difficult, I pray you. Can't you see I am only trying to do what I know is right? You can't forbid me your house. It's my pleasure to take care of you and protect your interests." His face had gone pale, and it seemed to Will, who looked back at him over his shoulder, that he was taking it too hard. He wouldn't allow any woman to brandish a whip over him, much less this foul-tempered old she-cat."

"Collin will protect my interests," Miss Florrie replied, her face set and thin-lipped. "As for taking care of me, I am capable of taking care of myself."

Sheldon smiled and reached for her hand. This was more like the old Aunt Florrie, hitting bluntly where she knew he was weakest. He could deal with this strategy. "You know that isn't so." He entwined her unwilling fingers in his. "How could you respect me if my integrity wasn't as great as your own?"

"What you are pleased to call your integrity is nothing but a thirst for excitement," she retorted. "If you join the Hanover Volunteers, you know my wishes." She withdrew her hands and adjusted her light silken shawl about her shoulders. He saw that her hands were trembling. "You have distressed me. I am going to my room."

He stood still, listening to her footsteps on the staircase. Not until he heard her bedroom door close did he turn to Will.

"You heard. What could I have done?" He flung out his arm in a gesture of despair.

"Nothin' I can see, unless you want to give up joinin' the militia to stop her frettin'." There was mockery and disgust in his voice.

Sheldon seemed oblivious of it. "Aunt Florrie is the last of my family. I fear this breach between us will not be a temporary thing. It is not easy, Will, to make so costly a decision."

Will relented suddenly, taking Sheldon's arm in a strong grip, as if by his own strength to impart more force to his words. "If it's my opinion that you want, I say you must not let a woman soften you too much. These times are for men to settle. Miss Hilliard, beggin' her pardon, knows nothin' but hearsay." He dropped his hands and arched his back to stretch stiff muscles. "I'll be goin'. I reckon if you talk to her alone—"

"I'll go with you," Sheldon told him. "I think she's more likely to understand if she knows I meant what I said."

From the front steps they watched Lacey bring up the horses. Their hooves raised little clouds of dust. "We need rain," he thought. Then, for the first time, he allowed himself to wonder how good the crops had been at Shipley, and what would happen to the plantation if war came.

Lacey held the reins tight to the bits as they mounted, his black eyes fixed on Sheldon. "I don't want fer to stay with Miss Florrie," he said solemnly.

"But you must—for me, Lacey," Sheldon said. "I want you to

pack my chest and bring it to Weedon's. Tell Miss Florrie where I am, if she asks."

The slave nodded and let the reins slip from his fingers. He stared after the horses until they were lost in the enveloping dust.

7

IN HIS room at Weedon's Tavern Sheldon untied the knot securing the silken kerchief that served for a sling, and gingerly flexed his arm. The movement made him wince, sending little spasms of pain through muscles so long unused to action. He let his arm hang limp for a moment, then raised it slowly above his head. Beads of cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Anyway, he thought, he looked fit again. The pain didn't matter. In a week's time he would be able to use his arm. He wondered what the kick of a rifle would feel like against his shoulder. Pressing the scar, he found it tender. That didn't matter, either. If he couldn't shoulder a rifle, he'd carry a saber. Maybe Mr. Henry would commission him a captain, considering his experience in the Indian War. God knew they had need of seasoned officers.

With his arm free of its sling, he gave an impression of well-balanced strength. His carefully cut coat accentuated his broad shoulders and tapering waist, and the high collar, he observed, throwing back his head, made him look as dignified as a Burgess. He studied his reflection in the mirror, approving of it for the first time in many weeks. Now he was whole again, and ready for anything that Mr. Henry or the Continental Congress could conceive.

"Ready, Will?" he asked, glancing at the Ranger out of the corner of his eye.

Will grunted. "I don't like this business of stalkin' Mr. Henry. Why can't we join up right here?"

"I dare say we could," Sheldon replied. "But I've an idea it would be wise to see him."

Will frowned. "We can't walk in there like Burgesses from Williamsburg and take up his time. Most likely he won't see us."

Sheldon drew himself up with a flourish of mock gravity. "We will pray his indulgence. It's said Mr. Henry is a plain man."

Evening was drawing in as they jogged along the hard, rough road leading to Scotchtown. Sheldon was beginning to regret his rashness in not having obtained a letter of introduction. What had possessed him to call so casually upon a man to whom everyone now looked as the leading figure of the day? Then he reassured himself that the very nature of Patrick Henry's struggle to preeminence would make him sympathetic with the earnestness that led Will and himself to this impulsive act. He began to recall the story of Henry's plea for the defendants in the *Parson's Cause*: the clergy exchanging sly looks of amusement, and Henry's father almost sinking out of his chair with embarrassment at the young lawyer's pitifully awkward exordium. And then, before he had gone very far, he had those same people—every person in the court room—listening to him in breathless awe and amazement. Henry's hold upon the populace had increased every day since then and there were many who thought his voice would be sufficient to lead the country into arms at any moment he chose.

Will, who knew little of the homely understanding that had helped to propel Henry's meteoric career, insisted all along upon the folly of their going thus unannounced to call upon him, and when the house and trees of Scotchtown were silhouetted against the deepening horizon, he played nervously with the reins and threw quick, apprehensive glances at Sheldon. "I'm wishin' we hadn't come," he mumbled.

"Well, we're not going to turn back, so don't look like that," Sheldon said, trying to conceal his own uneasiness.

They drew up before the house and Sheldon dismounted. The pit of his stomach felt as cold as his hands when he lifted the brass knocker. A negro boy ran around the corner of the house to take the horses. On the ground, Will felt more ill at ease. He had never before considered himself unpresentable in his hunter's buckskins, but for once he wished that he wore homespun and a neat frilled shirt. This Mr. Henry was a lawyer. What did he know of the frontier or the men who lived and fought there? No doubt he would dismiss him as an ignorant bumpkin, with one contemptuous glance. No matter. He would let Sheldon do the talking.

The door was opened by a middle-aged servant who squinted at them against the failing light. Somehow, Sheldon had the impression

that he was guarding the threshold against just such intruders as themselves, but the servant stepped aside to let them pass into the hall. Slightly disconcerted by the sound of flute music, Sheldon hesitated and looked inquiringly at the servant. The music grew louder, rising to a shrill crescendo.

"Mista Henry, he done playin' de flute," the servant explained.

Sheldon raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I had no idea your master was so accomplished. I don't want to disturb him, but will you tell him that Mr. Will McKee and Mr. Sheldon Hilliard have ridden from Fredericksburg to see him, and would be greatly honored if they might have a few moments' conversation with him?"

"Yessuh. Jes' step into de parlor. Ah'll tell Mista Henry right away."

Will followed Sheldon reluctantly into the room. It was a small room, rather meagerly furnished, and cheerless, except for the blazing logs in the fireplace opposite the tall, half-shuttered windows.

"Reckon I could wait outside for you," Will ventured, rubbing his hands before the fire.

"And offend Mr. Henry? No, indeed."

"Do you think he won't be offended by our comin'?"

"Shh!" Sheldon put his fingers to his lips. The music had ceased, and now a door at the far end of the hall was opened.

"Are the gentlemen in the parlor?" Patrick Henry asked his servant, and Sheldon and Will exchanged nervous glances. They waited breathlessly for him to appear. When he came into the room their eyes took in his slender figure in one swift glance before they bowed.

Sheldon thought, he's as plain as they said he was.

Henry returned their bow and came forward with quick stride. There was a dynamic quality in his step and keen, appraising eye. "Good evening, gentlemen. Won't you be seated?"

Sheldon felt a wave of reassurance at Henry's cordial smile. "I hope you will pardon this intrusion, sir. I am Sheldon Hilliard and this is my friend, Will McKee."

Will made another awkward bow, then edged as far into the shadows of the room as he dared.

"You are not disturbing me," Henry said, motioning Sheldon to

a chair beside the fireplace. "It is getting dark at an early hour," he observed, reaching for one of the lamp-lighters that lay in a neat little pile on the mantelpiece. "My servants do not realize that summer is over until they cannot see their hands before their faces." He lit the candle on the slender-legged table against the wall where Will was sitting. The rangy figure of the hunter seemed to absorb the warm, diffused glow.

"Mr. McKee, pray do not sit against that wall. There's a draught from the window. 'Twill give you a chill." Henry moved a chair for him within the circle of firelight. There had come suddenly into his manner such gracious concern that Will's tense body visibly relaxed, and he sighed softly.

"Now, gentlemen," Henry said, "what can I do for you?"

Since Henry had asked the question, Sheldon was not quite sure what foolish impulse had sent him here. There was, in truth, no reason for their coming, except to offer their services to the Hanover Volunteers, and they could have done that almost anywhere in Hanover. Of course, he couldn't ask Patrick Henry to give him and Will commissions. It was more likely the urge to see and meet this man that had brought him to Scotchtown, and now he was confronted with the task of justifying the visit. He glanced quickly at Will then back at Henry, whose expression was steadily and politely inquiring. It was difficult to know how to explain to this man, whose reputation for the exact turn of phrase was so high, their passionate desire to follow his leadership.

He began uncertainly. "I shall put my request very briefly, sir. Mr. McKee and I wish to join the Hanover Volunteers. When you first called the militia together in November we were at Point Pleasant—"

Henry's eyes widened and his set lips parted. "So you were there?"

"Yes, sir. I was wounded and was obliged to rest in camp before making the long journey back to Fredericksburg. Will, here, fought at Point Pleasant, too. He brought me home."

Will protested. "'Twas not much bringin' I had to do, sir. He's a strong lad and an able one. They made him a sergeant before we e'en saw an Indian."

Henry nodded slowly. "Men on the frontier learn to know true worth," he replied soberly, bringing a sudden flush to Sheldon's cheeks. "Pray go on, Mr. Hilliard. I am monstrously interested."

As Sheldon continued, Henry leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees, his strong fingers interlaced.

"Well, sir, none of us liked the way Lord Dunmore deserted General Lewis. He betrayed the army at Point Pleasant, and I, for one, swore never to fight again for the colonies while he was Governor. You would be surprised, sir, at the number of men who feel the same way." He paused, but Henry was silent, waiting for him to continue. Sheldon thought he caught a flicker of sympathy in the patriot's eyes.

"When I heard that you had summoned the militia of Hanover, my mind was greatly confused. I will fight for independence, sir, but never for the Governor. I asked the advice of Colonel Braxton."

Sympathy gave way to sharp appraisal in Henry's expression at mention of Braxton's name.

"You do not like him, sir?" Sheldon asked, quick to sense the change.

For a moment Henry hesitated, then replied frankly, "I feel there is too strong a bias toward aristocracy amongst the opulent."

Sheldon cried in protest, "But, sir, he said to me himself that he would become a party to any action that will preserve the welfare and dignity of the colonies."

"Possibly," Henry conceded, but there was enough doubt in his voice to indicate total disbelief that such were Braxton's sentiments. "What did Colonel Braxton advise you to do?" he asked.

"He told me to weigh the facts, and try to decide whether I thought war would lead to the betterment or detriment of the colonies."

"He admitted the possibility of war? Did it not occur to him that a strongly organized militia might prevent war?"

"I reckon it did, sir."

"No matter." Henry gave a deep sigh. "The fact is that you have decided to join the Hanover Volunteers. They are, for the most part, raw recruits. Many of them have neither arms nor uniforms. Men, such as yourselves, would be ludicrously out of place in the ranks. We're in need of experienced soldiers to train and lead these men,

and I will certainly recommend you for commissions. I judge that is what you had in mind."

Sheldon felt a tide of scarlet sweep into his face. That had certainly been in his mind, but he had not dared put the thought into words. Even to Will, he feared it would have sounded presumptuous, as if his service in the Indian War had been of such significance. Yet taxed with Henry's observation, he could not deny it.

Henry rose and went to the fireplace, standing pensively with his back to the flames. Hands clasped behind him, head thrown slightly back, his tall figure drawn erect, Sheldon had a vision of him as he must have appeared in the House of Burgesses on that memorable day when he had thundered, "Caesar had his Brutus—Charles the First his Cromwell—and George the Third—may profit by their example—" He could not have seemed to the Burgesses a loftier figure then than he did now to Sheldon who felt, suddenly, that he could follow a man like this anywhere.

Henry looked down at him and surprised a look of bold admiration. Slowly a smile loosened his firm mouth. "You understand that I can only recommend you for commissions. The militia have been instructed to elect their own officers."

"I understand, sir," Sheldon declared softly. "If necessary, I would be honored to serve in the ranks."

"Me, too," Will professed suddenly, with a violence that startled his listeners.

"If you will inform Captain Meredith of your desire to enlist, he will see that you are notified in the event that the militia are called up. And now that we have settled that, gentlemen, will you not stay to supper? Mrs. Henry would be pleased to have you."

"That is kind of you, sir, and we would be honored to meet Mrs. Henry. But I fear we must be riding back. Mr. McKee and I have many plans to make, and we must arrange lodgings in Hanover."

"It is a pity you cannot stay. I should have liked to hear more of your experience in the Indian expedition. Another time, I trust. We will meet again."

"It will be a happy day for me, sir, when we do," Sheldon told him with unself-conscious fervor.

Henry smiled his appreciation. Sheldon's open admiration struck a responsive chord. There was a solid, trustworthy quality in this

uncommonly strong and handsome young man. Upon such shoulders, he had hopes, the welfare of the colonies might have the good fortune to rest.

"What do you think of Mr. Henry, Will?"

They were trotting along the Hanover road, trying to keep their hands from growing numb in the frosty air, by stuffing them, one at a time, into their pockets.

"Nearly the finest man I ever met," Will replied with a note of reverence in his voice.

"Funny how it's always the little, unimportant people who make you feel uncomfortable," Sheldon reflected. "There's Mr. Henry, the most important man in the Colony, I reckon, and he made us feel as if we were truly welcome."

"Aye, he did," Will nodded. "And I might have had on silk and velvet for all the notice he took of my clothes. I had a mind to laugh when he told me to move out o' the draught, thinkin' of the icy blasts I've weathered in this same huntin' shirt."

"But, Will, he's an up-country man himself. I reckon that's why we like him. I'd be certain I was fighting for the right cause with him leading me." He paused reflectively. "Wouldn't you love to have seen him fighting the Stamp Act?"

Will nodded and jammed his fur cap further down on his head. "I wonder if he expects there'll be war soon."

"He's going to prepare us for it. I guess that's the best anyone could do."

They rode for some time in silence, deep in their separate thoughts. Then Will asked, "Do you really mean to take lodgings in Hanover, or was that just an excuse to get away?"

"I meant it. We'll discuss it over rumbullion at Mr. Smith's Tavern."

Sheldon remembered the letter in his pocket and took it out to read while Will sipped his drink with slow pleasure. Presently he looked at Will and grinned. "We have a very pressing engagement."

Will's brows flew up. This look on Sheldon's face seldom led to any good.

"Mr. Christopher Desmond extends us a most cordial invitation

to celebrate his niece's birthday at a ball two nights hence."

Will sank back in his chair with relief. "That has nothin' to do with me. I don't even know the gentleman."

"But it has, Will. He invites me to bring a friend with me, and you are that friend."

8

"LACEY, come here and button my waistcoat." Sheldon stood before the small, distorting mirror on the wall, adjusting his cravat. "Tell me, also, what Miss Florrie said to you."

"She didn't say nothin' much, Mars Sheldon," Lacey reported. "When de word comes fer me ter fetch yer chest from Weedon's an' bring it here, she tells me ter tak' de coach and git here fast as I kin. Says de stormy weather ain't gonna last long, but till it be over she don' wan yo'all runnin' roun' de country widout cober. I didn' wait fer her to say no mo'. I jes git out de coach an come here fas' I could."

Sheldon turned to Will and made him a deep bow. "You were right. Aunt Florrie is beginning to capitulate, and we will go in state to Mr. Desmond's ball."

"Damned if I go in these clothes," Will protested vigorously. "How do you expect me to sit down in these breeches without splittin' 'em?"

"No one's going to see the seat of your breeches, Will, and the coat fits you perfectly."

"Tip the mirror, Lacey," Will ordered, twisting before it to catch sight of his back. "Too long," he observed.

"You are wrong. It becomes you surprisingly well." The change which Sheldon's clothes had wrought in the soldier Will was startling. His rough exterior qualities seemed miraculously to have smoothed out under the satin and velvet. Only his strong figure continued to express self-denial of the things that soften a man. His speech was slightly incongruous in view of his fine clothes and the company he was about to consort with, but it lent its interest to Will's altered personality. Sheldon looked at him with genuine pride and wished that Aunt Florrie could see him.

"Lacey, adjust Mr. McKee's cloak."

Will stood silently while the cloak was thrown grudgingly about his shoulders. It was useless to argue. Sheldon would have his way this evening.

Will unfastened the clasp of his cloak and handed it to the be-wigged servant in yellow livery attending him. He could not keep his eyes from roaming awestruck over the white, brilliantly lit hall in which he stood. Never had he seen so much crystal afire with candlelight.

Sheldon nudged him and nodded toward the servant who was waiting to show them to the ballroom. "Don't stare so, Will. You will see everything in good time."

Will followed Sheldon with unconsciously silent tread. A surging of panic gripped him at the threshold of the ballroom. The splendor of the hall suddenly became commonplace at the sight of festooned flowers and pearls in the high white wigs of the ladies; of fine lace cascading from the throats of the gentlemen in brilliant dress and jewel-buckled slippers. He felt his mouth drop open and shut it quickly. It would never do for Mr. Desmond to see him for the first time gaping like the backwoods settler that he was. A dozen pair of eyes were on them, but to his infinite relief they rested chiefly on Sheldon. The glances of the ladies, he noticed with amusement, were entirely for his companion, who stood facing the scene with an assurance Will could not reconcile with the greenness of the lad in Dunmore's war.

Christopher Desmond moved toward them pompously, and returned Sheldon's bow. "My dear boy, I am so glad you have come." His face, perspiring along the edge of his wig, beamed with cordiality. Then he turned to Will, waiting introduction with open and disconcerting appraisal. Sheldon presented Will. For a fleeting moment, Desmond's face was clouded with speculation, then again, he bowed. "Honored, sir."

"Now come meet my niece." Taking the arm of each, he led them to the far corner of the room. "I have filled my house with young people tonight, and there are some whom you may know," he addressed Sheldon. "Tom Nelson and Mrs. Burwell are coming."

He shielded his mouth with his hand as he whispered, "Mrs. Nel-

son is about to present her husband with his seventh child."

Sheldon smiled at the implication that the life of a bachelor was an enviable one. But the news of Tom Nelson's coming pleased him. He would like to know his opinion of Patrick Henry and the Han-over militia.

"Sarah, my dear," Desmond drew his niece's attention from the gentleman in gray velvet at her side. "Mr. Hilliard you know, and I present his friend, Mr. McKee."

Sarah Desmond inclined her head. When she raised her eyes they rested on Sheldon behind the flutter of her fan.

"Mr. Hilliard is lately from the Indian War."

"And Mr. McKee, too," Sheldon hastily interpolated.

"It must be a brave man who fights against the savages," Sarah responded gently, and her glance, on Sheldon, at once wondering and admiring, told him that he found increasing favor in her eyes.

"Mr. McKee is far more valuable in that field than I, ma'am," he said, looking reassuringly at Will. "And much braver."

Sarah's eyes turned on Will, who shifted his feet uneasily, and she knew that she had made an instantaneous conquest. Will's dark eyes were fixed on her so intently that she felt her skin grow hot.

"We hear little but rumor," she remarked quickly, turning back to Sheldon, whose admiration was more concealed, if indeed it existed at all. "Pray tell me, are the Indians not vastly frightening?"

Will wanted to tell her that no Indian was ever so frightening as his entrance into her uncle's house. He felt sure that she could see beneath his fine clothes to the crude hunter, and there was no mistaking her preference for Sheldon. He stood wondering what color Miss Desmond's hair was beneath the absurdly high, jewelled wig, and watched her eyes move boldly over every feature of Sheldon's face. He would have stepped back to worship from a distance had he been able to move his rooted limbs. But he could not bring himself to move or speak again lest she address herself to him and he turn red and stammer and show too plainly this feeling he could not understand. If only Sheldon would go to another part of the house, make a conquest in the library or the parlor and get his cursed good looks out of the way!

The young man who had drawn aside when Sheldon and Will were presented to Sarah Desmond, stepped forward again and

claimed his place beside her. His face no longer expressed cordiality. It seemed to both men that jealousy lurked behind his hazel eyes and in the petulance of his full mouth. He was not more than twenty, with smooth, high-colored complexion and a softness about him that provoked Will's instant contempt. Above his rippling lace jabot his neck rose from a fat, pink roll into a series of ominous creases. In a year or two he would look like Peyton Randolph, Sheldon thought, and he couldn't imagine how Sarah could bear the sight of him. Yet he seemed to regard her possessively, and looked at him and Will as if he would eagerly see them frying in Purgatory. It was this that prompted Sheldon to ask, with the quietest of smiles, "Will you do me the honor of this dance, Miss Desmond?"

Sarah rose with alacrity and took his arm. "I should be delighted," she replied. Casting a guarded glance at the young man in gray, and smiling sweetly at Will, she moved off at Sheldon's side. The full folds of her sapphire blue brocaded dress swept the polished floor. The flush of animated joy that made her eyes seem larger and bluer than ever was not lost upon either Will or the man scowling beside him.

"They make a handsome pair." Will smiled mischievously.

"Who is he?" the other snapped.

"Speaking of that," Will responded, cocking an eyebrow at the young man, "both our host and hostess neglected to introduce us. I am Will McKee, at your service, sir." There was an almost defiant ring in his voice.

The young man shifted his feet impatiently and returned the bow Will made him. "I am Paul Drinkwater—your servant." He hastened on, "But who is that?"

"My friend," Will replied with an elaborate gesture, "is Mr. Sheldon Hilliard."

"I heard his name," Drinkwater said shortly. "But who is he?"

Will's dark eyes began to sparkle and a restrained smile twisted the corners of his mouth. "Do you mean how rich is he, sir, and what is his position in this land of fine-mannered gentlemen?"

Will thought that Drinkwater was going to hit him. Indeed, the knuckles of his clenched hands were white. "You are impertinent, sir," he cried. "I have a right to know who usurps the attentions of the lady I intend to marry. It is my duty to protect her from the

advances of mere nobodies."

Will laughed so loudly that many of the guests turned to look at him, glancing back questioningly at one another.

"And you are insulting, sir!" Drinkwater's voice, dropping to a low, menacing pitch, shook with anger.

Will stopped abruptly. "Why don't you do something about it, then?"

"'Twould be beneath me to soil my hands."

A chuckle from the hunter made the young man tear his hands apart, and at the same time an expression in the depths of Will's eyes caused him to reconsider the act he was contemplating. His glance went from Will's face to his arms where solid muscles were cramped in the velvet sleeves, then to his hands, weather-burned and toughened and full-veined.

"It would be unpardonable," he said softly, "to make a scene in Mr. Desmond's house and 'twould be monstrously upsetting to Miss Desmond—otherwise—"

Will bowed more profusely than before. "Whenever you have a mind to settle the argument, pray let me know. Anyone in Augusta can tell you where to find me."

"Augusta?" Drinkwater echoed.

"Aye. There we are used to parrying the thrust of Indians—only we find the tomahawk more effective than words—" With a slight bow and a slow smile, he left the young man alone by the empty sofa.

After supper, Sheldon found himself again in the company of Sarah Desmond. At first, he had been unaware of her attentions, for he was deep in conversation with Suzanna Burwell; but presently Suzanna tapped him with her fan and told him that Miss Desmond was trying all her wiles to capture his attention.

"I shall leave you two together," she teased.

"No, don't, please!" he urged in a whisper.

"Are you afraid?" She laughed quietly.

"No, but I do not care to come to blows with the gentleman at her side, and you can see, readily enough, that he's in no humor to take intrusion lightly."

When Suzanna looked at Drinkwater's round face set in a sneer

of distaste and resentment, she could not restrain a smile and raised her fan to conceal it. Behind the fan she murmured, "He looks as black as a thundercloud, Sheldon. What have you done?"

"Nothing, ma'am, I assure you. I believe the wine has gone to his head and he fancies some offense."

"Miss Desmond is speaking to you, and you must be nice to her," Suzanna told him. She was obviously in a mischievous mood. Catching Nelson's eye she beckoned to him, and making Sheldon a little curtsey, gave him a last teasing glance. "I can resist the music no longer," she said and went off on the arm of her brother-in-law.

"Mrs. Burwell is very handsome," Sarah observed softly, following Suzanna's small, slender figure with envious eyes. She wished her own were as slender, although she knew it was good and that the pale yellow bodice tight against her full breasts, and the heavy blue satin skirt falling in soft folds from a waist as small as Mrs. Burwell's, became her extravagantly well.

"It is hot in the house, Mr. Hilliard," she said. "Will you walk with me in the garden?"

"A pleasure, ma'am," Sheldon replied. But his eyes were not on her face. They were turned to Drinkwater who, in the rapidly emptying hall, was standing alone, a crimson tide mounting his face and open animosity in his eyes.

"You can't walk without a cloak," Sheldon insisted. "May I get you one?"

"Please. It is cold. Ask one of the servants. I'll wait for you here." She moved into the shadow of the wall, seeking shelter from the wind.

Drinkwater was standing unsteadily at the foot of the stairs when Sheldon returned for Sarah's cloak. The two men were alone except for an occasional couple strolling through the hall from the ballroom. Between these brief interruptions Drinkwater accosted him.

"Hilliard," he said thickly, "I would like a word with you."

"Your servant." Sheldon bowed with the faintest smile of amusement.

"I think it is time you knew that your attentions to Miss Desmond are distasteful."

Sheldon raised his eyebrows and his smile broadened.

"To whom are they distasteful, Drinkwater? You or Miss Desmond?"

Drinkwater shifted his feet unsteadily. "To me, sir. Damnably distasteful. I intend to marry her."

"Do you think she will accept you?" Sheldon inquired softly. He felt rather sorry for the young man who was so obviously drunk and so unbearably harried by Miss Desmond. On the other hand, he was not taking orders from Drinkwater, who was swaying slightly against the newel post. "Why shouldn't she marry me?" He belched loudly. "Good family—land—" Then he pointed to the door. "She is waiting for you now—out there."

"Surely you cannot object to Miss Desmond's walking with me in the garden. She found the house very warm."

Sheldon moved closer to him. "If the suggestion would not give you offense, I would advise you to walk to the river and back. The cold air would do you good." To his surprise, Drinkwater disappeared unsteadily through the doorway.

Sheldon gave a soft chuckle as a servant handed him Sarah's cloak.

The arbor to which Sarah led Sheldon was sheltered by thickly twined rose vines. They walked its length slowly before she said, with a suddenness that startled him, "You were annoyed with me after supper. Why?"

In intense confusion he stumbled. "Annoyed? But I—what makes you say that?"

"I saw it in your face. You looked very angry when I spoke to you, and Mrs. Burwell was laughing at me."

"She wasn't! I assure you that she wasn't. It was Mr. Drinkwater"—he went on, wishing that he had never come to the garden with her—"she was laughing at. It amused her that he looked at me as if he wished me dead."

Paul! What a fool he was, wearing his affection and his jealousy so openly on his sleeve, making a spectacle of himself at her birthday party. If she hadn't been such a goose she wouldn't have encouraged the first man she met when she came out to the colonies, but it seemed so exciting at the time, and she knew her friends in England expected her to write of a fascinating American beau. Well,

she was sixteen now, and had better sense. She paused, and laying her hand on Sheldon's arm forced him to look at her. "I shall tell Paul tonight that I have seen quite enough of him. He has behaved unpardonably all evening, drinking so much wine that he can scarcely stand up, and being so rude—"

"But, my dear Miss Desmond, you mustn't judge him so harshly by one evening's conduct. You must admit that you have been the center of all admiration tonight—"

"All but yours," she added quickly.

"Mine, too," he corrected her, and his voice, for the first time, set her heart to pounding with violent hope. Feeling her hand tremble on his arm, he cursed himself for a fool. In spite of all his resolutions, she had made him soften, and the candor of her feelings touched a vulnerable masculine pride. A teasing smile gave a provocative twist to his mouth. "I am sure you will find Mr. Drinkwater as charming as ever tomorrow."

She tossed her head impatiently. "You needn't defend him, sir. I have made up my mind." Provoked almost to tears, she turned sharply and went rapidly along the path toward the house. She knew that her cheeks were flaming and that her eyes would betray her humiliation. Sheldon followed swiftly after her, making ineffectual attempts to say something that would calm her, but she rushed on, determined that he, at least, would not see her face in the light of the hall before she could get to her room and compose herself. At the end of the arbor, with such suddenness that she could not suppress a startled cry, she collided with Drinkwater. At any other time she would have burned with embarrassment, but the sight of him, standing there with suspicion written all over his face, infuriated her. She thrust out her arm and pushed him aside, and when he tried to stop her she drew her cloak about her and ran past him up the sloping lawn to the terrace.

Left alone with Drinkwater, Sheldon steeled himself for the scene¹ that he knew was coming. Although Drinkwater's walk had considerably sobered him, it had done nothing to allay his jealousy. He turned on Sheldon in unreasoning fury. Even in the semi-darkness, the muscles in his neck were visible, standing out like whipcord.

"You'll pay for this, Hilliard!" he cried furiously.

"For what?" Sheldon asked indifferently.

"For what? You saw how she treated me, just now, as if the sight of me sickened her!"

"Perhaps it does sicken her, Drinkwater. You are not a very pretty sight, and you had no business prowling around the arbor, spying on her."

Drinkwater took a step forward, thrusting his face menacingly toward Sheldon's. "My presence here was not intentional. It is a cold night. I hardly expected to find you two sitting in the arbor. When I heard your voices I was naturally interested to know what you had to say in such intimacy to Miss Desmond."

Sheldon smiled as indulgently as one humoring a child. "If you heard what we said you should be both relieved and ashamed."

"I did not hear you, but imagination can supply your conversation."

"If your imagination tells you that my feeling toward Miss Desmond is only one of esteem and friendship, then it is quite correct," Sheldon replied, weary of the thrusts and counter-thrusts.

"My imagination tells me otherwise, and I give you fair warning that if I find you alone with Miss Desmond again, I shall deal with you, sir, in a manner you deserve!"

"Indeed! If your doubts are so strong, would you care to settle the matter now?" Sheldon stood close before him, his hands doubled into fists at his side. "You may name your weapons and I shall be glad to accommodate you."

There was an electric silence before Drinkwater replied, "I would not give Miss Desmond cause to remember her birthday with displeasure."

Sheldon's glance, half amused, half contemptuous, swept him from head to foot. Without a word he walked off, leaving Drinkwater standing in the deepest shadows of the arbor.

THE spring of 1775 broke early and clear in the Tidewater. Wagons began to thread their way northward, carrying provisions and clothes to the harried people of Boston, who were smarting under the occupation by General Gage's troops and suffering for the sim-

plest necessities of life. It was almost certain that the outbreak of hostilities in Massachusetts was beyond prevention. Following the lead of Fairfax County in Virginia, Massachusetts was already raising and equipping independent companies, who paraded on the village greens in full view of the "lobster backs."

The wave of determined resistance from the North merely strengthened the resolutions of the Virginia patriots. The Tory hand, weakened under successive blows, was forced to show itself. Line up with the Americans or take the consequences! Wearied of memorials, addresses and petitions to the King, the radicals cried for action. Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee voiced the general sentiments with their aggressive proposals—particularly Lee's to the King which was too strong to risk sending—advising His Majesty to dismiss his most intimate councillors whose advice was unwise and destructive to any hope of conciliation.

The merchants of London, Bristol and Liverpool joined their neighbors in petitioning Parliament for conciliation to clear again the channels of trade, but the fact had to be faced that Great Britain and her American colonies were teetering too precariously on the brink of war for any hope of salvaging the diplomatic wreck.

In March, when he could put off the visit no longer, Sheldon took Will to Chericoke. Will had refused to leave the scene of likely action even to make a hurried trip to Augusta, but he was just as reluctant to be exposed for the second time to unfamiliar finery and grand parties.

"Colonel Braxton isn't likely to give a ball," Sheldon reassured him. "I reckon he's worried sick with his ships open to seizure and the prospect of a closed market for his tobacco. They accuse him of being a Tory and I imagine it's none too pleasant for him.

"If he's worried, it doesn't seem a good time to visit him," Will said reasonably.

"I've got to see him, Will. He's managing Shipley for me."

"Seems to me you've been lookin' for a chance to get out o' Hanover."

"Of course I haven't!" Sheldon protested, but a faint tinge of color crept into his face.

"Well, every time Mr. Desmond asks us back to Audley, you tell him you're about to go some place or other."

Sheldon went on packing his saddle-bags. "There's nothing to stop you from going to Audley." He smiled to himself at the thought of Will paying a formal call on Sarah Desmond.

"Not without you! I'd rather visit Miss Florrie," Will declared, making a final stand. "She isn't so bad if you get used to her."

Sheldon responded with an oath. "Aunt Florrie doesn't want us. I told Lacey to tell her we'd be delighted to see her at Christmas, and what did she do but send back word that she was visiting the Pages at Mannsfield and wouldn't be home till after the New Year. Damned if I can't take a hint!"

Will groaned. "We usually do what you want. God's teeth if you shouldn't of been a lawyer, Sheldon."

When Sheldon and Will arrived at Chericoke a mid-day sun was flooding the fields, giving to the damp, overworked earth a spurious richness. The slaves' black skins glistened with the labor of preparing the land for crops and of polishing coaches and harness and trimming broad lawns.

The front door stood open. Standing on the threshold they could see through hall and river door to the far bank of the Pamunkey. It was a sight Sheldon missed in the summer-time when the bordering trees were in full foliage and heat mist so often obscured the far shore. All around the house poplar, oak and beech were breaking into bud. It would not be long before broad shadows threw a sheltering mantle over the lawns, and lazy slaves would gather there on some pretext or other to escape the intolerable heat of the open places.

Will rubbed off the dust of his boots on the legs of his breeches and jerked down his hunting shirt as they stepped into the house. He had had enough of polished floors and spindle-legged chairs to last him a lifetime. Sheldon couldn't know how he longed for the springy carpet of the woods, the solid, close-growing pines of his Augusta forests, and the smell of damp earth in the clearings. The fiddling bit of hunting he and Sheldon had done in Hanover hadn't even worked up an honest sweat. He wanted weeks of it, sleeping out with nothing but towering trees and dark sky for cover. He was going to get soft, living like the gentry, in hot rooms, and eating a damned sight more than was good for him.

"Don't look so gloomy, Will. Colonel Braxton will think you came under protest." Sheldon laughed, going through the hall in search of the Colonel's Sam.

"Aye! An' I did," Will scowled.

Braxton came into the house looking like an excited schoolboy, his shirt and breeches soiled with stable dirt.

"Sheldon! You have come at last." He took Sheldon's arms in a firm grasp. "I had a notion you were avoiding Chericoke purposely."

"You know I wouldn't, sir. I have brought my friend, Will McKee."

"So! You are Will McKee. I have heard so much of you that I feel I know you well." Braxton's steady gaze was cordial and admiring.

"I feel the same about you, sir."

"We have many interests in common, Mr. McKee. The frontier is one of them." He turned again to Sheldon. "You must come right out to the stable and see what a bargain I have struck. Then I want to hear all your news—yours and Mr. McKee's." Walking out, he explained, "I traded Jenny for Colonel Corbin's Pepper. I've wanted that horse from the first day I laid eyes on him. He'll jump anything on God's earth you put him at and he goes right smart across country. I didn't think the Colonel would even consider the trade, but I found him in a tractable humor. You've got your father's eye for a horse, Sheldon. Tell me what you honestly think of him."

Pepper was a big, brown horse near seventeen hands, rangy and well-muscled. The lines of the thoroughbred were in the refined curve of his neck and the strong slender legs.

"You're right, sir. He's a prize," Sheldon exclaimed. "A little big for my liking but there's a lot of power there. Have you ridden him yet?"

"First thing this morning. Never had a better ride. By the way, did you feel the earthquake?"

"Earthquake? No. When?"

"This morning. It gave me quite a start. At first I thought it was the vibration of cannon. I'm afraid it's symbolic." Braxton rubbed his hands on his handkerchief. "I'm off for Richmond tomorrow

and, you know, I'm beginning to dread it. The Convention assembles in St. John's. I have a presentiment that we meet under ominous clouds."

"Why is that, sir?" Sheldon asked, disturbed by Braxton's tone.

"Richard Lee and Patrick Henry are going to drag us into war if they can, and I fear the stage is set for them. The Governor is in an ambiguous mood. He won't relinquish a vestige of his authority, yet he's afraid to resist the popular will."

Sheldon asked suddenly, "Do you think it would be possible for Will and me to go to the Convention?"

"I think it would be an excellent idea," Braxton told him. "I would like for you to see the functioning of such an Assembly." He smiled wryly. "Of course, I realize that you have caught the soldier's fever and that once afflicted with it, you will not be content with any other life—at least, for the present."

"There is one other thing I'd give my life to," Sheldon corrected.

"Yes. You spoke of that. But would you be happy for long as a planter, married, with a family of children when you have become so used to going where and when you please?" Braxton turned a searching glance on him.

"Under the circumstances you say I spoke of—yes."

A shadow of curiosity crossed Will's face. Did Colonel Braxton say married? Sheldon married?

"And if what you wish would come to pass?"

Sheldon shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that should determine whether or not Shipley ought to be sold, and you are the only one who can decide," Braxton said. "But whether you eventually decide to keep it or not, you must give some thought to the fact that you are spending valuable time on a career that is neither your heritage nor, I feel, your destiny."

Braxton was silent for a moment. This was an argument he and Sheldon would never settle. Presently he said, "Come back to the house now. Mrs. Braxton will be very angry with us if we are late for dinner."

Galt's Tavern in Richmond was already crowded when the three men arrived. Men in militia uniform, gentlemen in fine broadcloth and tri-cornered hats of felt and beaver, and men in homespun

jammed the bar and public rooms, for there was much of interest in Richmond besides the Convention. Many crises had prepared the Virginians for whatever course the Assembly took, although there were, among the gathering, merchants and factors whose businesses were at stake, who drank their ale and rumbullion in nervous gulps and debated in loud voices the effect their opinions would have with the delegates. Quarter-racing and cock-fights provoked a large part of the general argument and much betting in crumpled currency and hard silver before the bettors, many of them weaving with their liquor, went boisterously from the tavern, vaulted onto their horses and galloped off toward the race-track and the match of cocks just beyond the court house.

Braxton left Sheldon and Will with the company in the bar while he went to his room to refresh himself after the dusty journey. Will got into conversation with a wizened trapper from the Illinois country who told him that the Cherokees were going to sign a treaty with Nathaniel Hart, Daniel Boone's friend, and Richard Henderson for land in Kentucky, and that Henderson had already advertised for settlers. With Braxton's argument on the King's sovereignty still ringing in his mind, Will demanded to know if any of them expected to keep their land without fighting the King for it.

The old trapper stared at him with watery eyes and a quizzical smile that stretched the corners of his pallid mouth. "The King can't complain of a new colony, can he?"

Will's eyes narrowed to slits. "The King might not like the way it's run."

The trapper shrugged his shoulders and lifted his tankard to his lips.

The air in the tavern was close with the fetid odor of stale tobacco, beer and liquor. The pungent reek of sweat from the slaves stumbling through the tavern with their masters' chests and saddlebags did not improve the atmosphere. Sheldon stood it as long as he could, then nudged Will and they stepped outside into the fresh March air.

"I'm for the races," he said. "How about you?"

Will nodded and mopped his brow with his sleeve. "Smells like a tepee in there."

"Reckon we can hire horses. We'd better ask at the stable." They

strolled back to the tavern yard and were accommodated after much discussion and a promise to return by three o'clock.

"Up the hill, Will," Sheldon called, leading the way on his sorrel mare. "I want to see where Liberty will be defended."

They sat their horses before St. John's church and glanced from the unimpressive frame building to the sparkling rapids of the James flowing between high banks. Up the hill from the far side a coach rolled slowly, topped the crest and rumbled down past the two men. It was a handsome coach with flashing yellow wheels. Sheldon and Will stared at it as it went by. One of the delegates, perhaps. Then, for a moment after it had passed, Sheldon followed its lacquered body with his eyes.

"What's the matter with you?" Will asked. "Seen a ghost?"

Sheldon made no reply. His heart was hammering against his ribs and he knew that his face was white for he could feel the blood draining out of it. As strength came back to him he had an almost uncontrollable desire to gallop after the coach, but he turned back, instead, to Will, as if he would find the answer in his puzzled eyes.

"Something about that coach startled you. What was it?" Will asked.

"I saw something—someone—I was surprised to see. That was all," Sheldon murmured. Without further explanation he turned his horse back toward town. He knew it was Evelyn sitting in the coach with another woman and that her face, so long unseen, had turned to him without recognition as she passed.

Sheldon could not find anyone who was able to identify the coach with the yellow wheels. Daily he walked the streets, hoping for sight of it. Next time, he wouldn't be such a fool. He would follow it and force Evelyn to speak to him; at least to explain why she had left him at Chericoke without a word of farewell.

Even the opening day of the Convention could not hold his interest at first. He didn't tell Braxton that he had seen Evelyn, but Braxton suspected that something disturbing had happened. Climbing the hill to St. John's, Sheldon was completely preoccupied, looking this way and that, slackening his pace at sight of every female figure until he could clearly see the lady's face, then moving on watchfully. More than one escort gave him a dark, offended look and Braxton felt that there was going to be trouble before they

reached the church. As they turned onto the path, bordered by new grass and maples feathery with spring budding, he gave a quiet sigh of relief. The excitement of the meeting would make Sheldon forget this sudden obsession for ladies' faces.

Edmund Pendleton and Benjamin Harrison, standing together at the door, bowed to Braxton as he approached. Their faces were grave, almost too grave, Sheldon thought. Braxton presented Sheldon and Will, but the delegates were obviously in no mood for trivial conversation. With brief excuses they accompanied Braxton to his place in one of the square, high-backed pews. Sheldon and Will made their way to the gallery and took their seats looking down upon the pulpit.

There was a growing rumble of conversation as the delegates continued to arrive. Will's iron-muscled hand closed on Sheldon's arm. "Who's that fat one down there?"

Sheldon laughed and leaned forward. "That is the venerable Peyton Randolph, and the man with the reddish hair is Richard Henry Lee. You've heard of them, Will. Mr. Randolph is the Speaker, and Mr. Lee is Colonel Braxton's most despised enemy." His eyes roamed the room. "There are Thomas Nelson and Mann Page."

Will nodded and Sheldon saw with amusement that his eyes were as bright and restless as a young boy's at a fair. "I see one man I know," Will announced proudly, pointing down at George Washington's tall, straight figure. "A good surveyor, he is."

Suddenly the man they were both waiting to see caught their eye. With the shambling simplicity of a country boy, Patrick Henry, in dark gray breeches and coat, moved to his seat in the third pew on the north side of the church. His strong, angular profile was visible to the spectators in the gallery.

Will stiffened. "Why don't they pay more attention to him? Look, he's sitting by himself."

"Maybe he wants to, Will." Sheldon grinned.

But Will was not pacified. "That may be, but he's the greatest man sitting in this church."

The buzz of conversation had subsided. Someone silenced Will with a glance. While the business of the day was discussed, Sheldon looked about him at his fellow spectators. There were a few women in the gallery but none was familiar to him. The men were grim-

faced, many of them trappers whose eyes were on William Christian of Fincastle, come to plead for Kentucky's right to protection. There were merchants and factors, fearful that the restrictions upon exportation would be brought into effect before September because of the trouble up in Boston. All faces were set in concentrated attention on the one hundred and twenty delegates, the most astute minds in Virginia, each one, in some degree, committed to the patriot cause.

The meeting was a short one. With ponderous dignity, Speaker Randolph laid before the Convention the proceedings of the Continental Congress, together with letters from Benjamin Franklin, William Bollan and Arthur Lee, who advised from abroad that the petition to His Majesty had been presented and graciously received. The delegates nodded. Great Britain was beginning to realize the stupidity of cutting herself off from American trade.

Will began to fidget. This wasn't what he had come all the way to Richmond to hear. He wanted fireworks; he wanted Patrick Henry to get up and tell 'em they'd have to fight for their rights. Then he'd grease his rifle, give an almighty yell, and join the first line. All this thankin' the delegates and throwing posies around wasn't gettin' them any place.

When the Convention adjourned, Braxton met them in high spirits. He was not so sure there would be war now. It looked as if England was reconsidering her colonial policy. Archibald Cary had persuaded him to go back to Ampthill for the night. Pendleton and Colonel Harrison were going to be there for supper and they were going to discuss ways and means of suppressing the Lee-Henry junto. It would be an interesting discussion. "Colonel Cary said he would be delighted to have you," he told them.

Will and Sheldon exchanged hasty glances. "It would be unwise of us to go," Sheldon declined. "We could not share the antagonism to Mr. Henry."

"Hmm." Braxton's eyebrows went up in disapproving arcs. "You have felt the spell. I suppose it is as well for you not to go, then. You wouldn't enjoy it."

Will saw a chance to do some business and accompanied one of the merchants to the running for the sweepstake purse. Sheldon

refused to leave town, still hopeful of finding Evelyn. But on the third day he could no longer resist the desire to see what was happening in St. John's. It wasn't easy to persuade Will, who said he wouldn't listen to a lot of chattering about nothing. When he finally succeeded, they found the church bulging with spectators. Aisles and doorways were crowded, and in many of the open windows people were clinging to the ledges. Sheldon pushed and wormed his way through the crowd to a window at the east end of the church. The tension in the atmosphere set his pulse racing. He turned to be sure that Will was following. Here was undoubtedly what they had both come to see and hear.

They hoisted themselves up to the ledge of the last window and peered in at the Assembly. Opposite them stood Patrick Henry, offering his resolutions for the establishment of a regular militia.

Will chuckled softly. "Your friend, the Speaker, doesn't look very pleased with our leader."

"Be still, Will," Sheldon cautioned. Then he bent over to question a tall, well-dressed man standing below him. "Has he been speaking long?"

"This is the second resolution. Evidently he didn't like the softness of the first resolution of thanks to the Jamaica Assembly. He sprang up from his seat as if a wasp had stung him."

Henry had obviously primed himself for this meeting. The awkwardness and uncertainty of his usual struggle to express himself was conspicuously lacking. His voice was clear and direct and his words were marked with fearless emphasis.

"Resolved, therefore: That this colony be immediately put into a state of defense; and that . . . be a committee to prepare a plan for embodying, arming and disciplining such a number of men as may be sufficient for that purpose."

Scarcely had he finished speaking before a wild and angry debate commenced. Opposing delegates turned with venom on one another and were quieted by the more reflective. On the whole, there was no cause for such violence, did not the entire subject resemble a keg of gunpowder toward which the fuse was steadily burning. In the first and second resolves there was nothing especially provocative; simply that a well-regulated militia would obviate the necessity of a standing army, "always subversive to the quiet and dangerous to

the liberties of the people": and that the establishment of such a militia was necessary because "the remissness of the Government in calling us together in a legislative capacity renders it too insecure in this time of danger and distress, to rely that opportunity will be given of renewing them in general assembly. . . ." It was the third that seemed, to the opponents of the plan, to lead directly to war.

One after the other, Richard Bland, Robert Carter Nicholas, as treasurer of the Colony, Colonel Harrison and Edmund Pendleton, rose and fought the resolutions. "They are premature, they are dangerous, we are not justified in assuming the risk." They seemed to hurl the weight of their combined argumentative force at Henry, at the Speaker, and at their fellow delegates.

Sheldon smiled at the remembrance of Braxton's assertion that ways and means would be found to suppress the Lee-Henry junto. For all the weighty logic of these men, the force of Henry's last resolution was not impaired, nor did the buzz of private argument, stimulated by Henry's evident assumption that war was inevitable, subside.

The resolutions were seconded by Richard Henry Lee in a defiant voice. Washington was silent, resting his head lightly on his hand. But his blue gray eyes were fixed on Henry with an expression of deep meditation. One and all knew—it was impossible not to realize—that what Henry was demanding was the concession that war had already come; that all further talk of peace was mere prattle; that accepting war as a fact, they should instantly prepare for it.

Slowly Henry rose again. He had not finished with the submissionists.

"No man, Mr. President, thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism as well as of the abilities of the very honorable gentlemen who have just addressed the House. But different men often see the same subject in different light . . . The question before the House is one of awful moment to the country . . . I consider it as nothing less than a question of slavery. . . . Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason toward my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of heaven, which I revere above all earthly things." Turning slightly in the pew where he stood, his

eyes moved across the upturned faces with a look of such poignant earnestness that not a single sound broke the pause. There was calmness, deliberate self-restraint in his speech, and when he went on, the eyes of every person in the church were on him, knowing of old that his slender figure was as expressive of his indomitable conviction as was his voice.

"Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope . . . Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and provide for it. I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British Ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the House."

Will was sitting as motionless as a stone image. He had not spoken again to Sheldon who was gripping the window ledge with clammy fingers.

The sonorous voice began to rise, slowly, steadily. "There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free . . . we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight!! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!"

Sheldon's eyes turned to Peyton Randolph's face and he thought it was the only time he had ever seen it pale. He felt, rather than heard, the faint gasp that went through the House.

"They tell us, sir, that we are weak . . . But when will we be stronger? Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty . . . There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged, their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come!! I repeat it, sir, let it come!!!"

With the hopeless stoop of a condemned galley slave, Henry bowed his head and crossed his hands before him. To the electrified audience, the manacles seemed almost visible. "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?" Then he raised his head in a gesture of supplication and

prayed, "Forbid it, Almighty God." The burning flame leaped back into his eyes and he turned toward the Loyalists.

"I know not what course others may take . . . but as for me—" The tendons in his neck stood out like whipcord as he threw his arms above his head. A shaft of light from the east window struck the silver blade of a paper-cutter clenched in his right hand. Men leaned forward, faces faintly flushed and eyes hot with the excitement of an appeal they had thought no Virginian would dare to express openly. Henry's voice rose to a thunderous pitch, the walls of the church throwing it back tremulously to his listeners. "Give me liberty!"—he hurled his arms apart and the manacles seemed to clatter to the floor. Then he brought his right fist sharply to his breast—"or give me death!"

Tense silence filled the church. The call of a robin, soft on the spring morning, was the only sound to break the stillness. No one had yet found will to move his eyes from the face of the man who had held their reason and their emotions in such a relentless grip. On the window ledge, Will and Sheldon sat transfixed, weakened by the prickling thrills that raced up their spines. They scarcely heard Richard Lee, who rose to continue the argument with all his fine-spun rhetoric; nor Thomas Jefferson, the tall, auburn-haired young delegate from Piedmont who followed him. Henry's colleagues were losing no time rolling in on the tide of the spell he had cast over the House.

Sheldon and Will looked at each other. "He has surpassed himself today," Sheldon breathed. "We'll fight now, Will."

Will nodded, his brain too tumultuous for speech. There would be no holding the people now. News of this speech would spread like wild-fire; it would galvanize the country for resistance. Suddenly he lifted his eyes to the gallery. Those were the people who would spread the word fastest. The spectators next the railing were still leaning forward. He particularly noticed one man whose sunburned face was deeply intent. Up-country, he thought, impressed by the lean, hard features and then the man smiled and, turning, addressed the lady at his side. For the first time, Sheldon was permitted a full view of the lady's face and when he saw it, he gave a little cry and leaped down from the ledge. Evelyn was here! His breath caught in his throat as he pushed his way through the crowd to the church door, and then he stopped, shaking his head at his folly. What mad-

ness had made him think that he could rush into the church and up to the gallery? He would have to wait here, with some show of dignity and self-control, and greet her calmly when she came out. Words sped in excited confusion through his mind. Love, hurt, surprise, indifference, were considered in turn for the appropriate greeting.

When, finally, the crowd in the doorway turned and walked past him—some thoughtful, others discussing the electrifying meeting in tense voices—he caught sight of Evelyn. Outside the doorway she paused and glanced expectantly behind her. Nerves quivering, his throat constricted and parched, he moved away from the shadow of the wall. As he approached her, all the fine phrases that had been so carefully formed were lost in a tumult of desperate longing. If she looked at him now, he knew that he would stand rooted to the ground, his senses concentrated on the one undeniable truth—that he wanted her more than anything in the world. Every moment of their hours together, their quarrels and recriminations and brief interludes of understanding, had marked them for each other more surely than a thousand placid meetings and the tenderest ardor. It was enough that she had ever said she loved him. He would hear no other words from her as long as he lived.

As he moved on, elbowing through the crowd, he kept his eyes fastened on her face and saw her lips part in a flashing smile. The young man he had observed in the gallery stepped to her side. They spoke and then she slipped her arm through his and returned his intense look with flushed excitement.

For a timeless age Sheldon stood there, unable to take his eyes from her face, more beautiful in its animation than he had remembered. The exciting lilt of her stride, the proud head and the pressure of her long fingers were for the sunburned stranger beside her. He could have reached out and touched them both as they passed, but he remained immovable, feeling a stinging in his eyes and an unfamiliar violence in his heart. He saw no one else who went by, though many nodded and some spoke. Will touched him on the shoulder and commenced to talk, but what he said required no answer. He knew there were times when it was best not to ask questions. He had seen Sheldon look like this once before, after Clen was killed.

PART V

A MATTER OF GUNPOWDER

THE blackness of an April night began to pale before the dawn. Feathery gray streaks brushed the tips of the pines that bordered the outskirts of Williamsburg. Up and down the streets adjacent to the powder magazine, Captain James Innis and his city volunteers moved warily on patrol. All night long these men had been on duty, hoping to prevent the outraged citizenry themselves from turning out in a body to guard the powder and arms that were the only positive safeguard of their security.

The proceedings of the Convention in Richmond had stirred alarm in Dunmore's already apprehensive mind. It would be too easy to arm the militia with guns and powder from the magazine; folly not to seize it until the people had cooled off. Nobody would say how the news of the Governor's intentions leaked out of the Palace, but a word of warning was sufficient for the people. James Innis gathered his volunteers and defied His Lordship to act.

Warmed by the liquid contributions of the taverns, the men grew negligent. Some sought their beds; others remained to talk and drink and speculate on the outcome of the scare.

Then, just before break of dawn, out of the shadow of the Palace where they had been concealed, crept a body of sailors and marines brought up from the armed schooner *Magdalene* at Burwell's Ferry. Led by Captain Stretch and accompanied by Dunmore's little Palace wagon, they made their way stealthily toward the magazine, avoiding Duke of Gloucester Street and the less negligent volunteers who occasionally appeared in their way. It amused Stretch that the feat should be so easy to accomplish. Sheer stupid, these colonials were, doing a fine business of patrolling until they got tired of playing soldier. Across the market square he led his men, around in the shadow of the brick wall, doubling back to the rear door. The wagon stood under guard ready for the powder. Stretch unlocked the door and ordered his men quietly to work. Rolling the barrels with silent care, they went about their business with the speed of trained hands.

The long-barreled muskets and squat blunderbusses standing in rows in the room above tempted them, but they had orders to do no more than strip the locks. All Dunmore wanted was the powder, and he wanted that before dawn.

Fifteen half-barrels were rolled out to the wagon and loaded in, before Stretch began to get nervous.

"That's enough, boys," he whispered, and the word passed from man to man. "Take it away and careful, or you'll get your bellies full o' rebel lead."

The wagon moved away from the market square, the men scattering cautiously into advance and forward guards for the precious plunder. Dawn had just broken when the powder reached the schooner at Burwell's Ferry. By the time word of the theft routed the Williamsburgers from their beds and brought the volunteers running from the taverns, the *Magdalene* had weighed anchor and was sailing around to Yorktown, where the man-of-war *Fowey* awaited transfer of the powder.

Not since the Boston Tea Party had Williamsburg been hurled into such tumult as it awoke to on the twentieth of April. In angry, threatening groups the people rushed from their houses and bore down on the Palace green. Protesting and threatening cries reached the ears of His Lordship, fidgety with nerves and not quite so confident now of the wisdom of his move. What was he going to do to quiet this howling mob, and how could he best convince his Council that he had acted in good faith? One thing was certain, he would have to get Lady Dunmore and the children away before he provoked a civil war. Then let the rebels be damned. He'd free the slaves and lay the town in ashes!

He was pacing the room in an irritable, defiant mood when he was told that Peyton Randolph waited upon him. Dunmore bridled at the announcement. Why must he see these people, humor them, justify his orders? He was the representative of His Sovereign Majesty in Virginia, and the people had no more right to question his actions than those of the King!

He seated himself behind his desk, put one hand, trembling with anger, on his hip and drummed rapidly with the fingers of the other on the polished surface of his desk. When Speaker Randolph, red in the face and puffing from the exertion of climbing the stairs, was

shown into his presence, Dunmore nodded stiffly and waited for him to speak.

"Your Excellency," the venerable emissary bowed, drew a long breath and let it out slowly, "I have the honor to present an address to you by—"

"Yes, yes, get on with it," Dunmore interrupted acidly.

After a fleeting glance of annoyance at the pompous figure of the Governor, Randolph unrolled the address in his hand and read :

"To His Excellency, the Right Honorable John, Earl of Dunmore, His Majesty's Lieutenant, Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Colony and Dominion of Virginia:—The humble address of the Mayor, recorder, aldermen, and common council of the City of Williamsburg":

An impatient sigh broke from the Governor's lips, but Randolph went on, unheeding.

"We beg leave to represent to Your Excellency, that, as the magazine was erected at the public expense of this colony—"

Dunmore's eyes strayed to the window, his fingers drummed louder on the mahogany desk. In his troubled mind, Randolph's voice was like a steady droning.

"We have too much reason to believe that some wicked and designing persons have instilled the most diabolical notions into the minds of our slaves . . ."

The Governor was forming a reply in his mind; an ambiguous one that would quiet the people, yet commit himself to no action save that dictated by his own judgment.

"Considering ourselves as guardians of the city, we, therefore, humbly desire to be informed by Your Excellency, upon what motives and for what particular purpose, the powder has been carried off in such a manner, and we earnestly entreat Your Excellency to order it to be immediately returned to the magazine."

When he had finished speaking, Randolph drew a fine linen handkerchief from his sleeve and smothered a cough behind its soft folds. The voices of the populace had subsided to a rumbling murmur of sound.

Dunmore had made up his mind. Rising from his chair, and summoning the dignity he felt would most impress his listener, he delivered his reply. There was rumor of an insurrection in a neighbor-

ing county—there *was* some sort of a rumor from Surrey, he reassured himself—and he had removed the powder from the magazine to a place of perfect security. Upon his word and honor it would be returned when it was needed. He had removed it in the night time to avoid alarm, and he was greatly surprised to hear that the people were under arms. Of course, he should not think it prudent to put powder into their hands at such a time.

Randolph regarded the Governor with a mixture of disfavor and admiration. It was scarcely fair that Dunmore's slight cast of eye, giving him an almost crafty expression, should force one to form such judgment of him, when perhaps the man had done the best he knew under trying circumstances, but Randolph could not trust him or his motives. Yet there had been clever logic in his reply. With the passing of every day, Dunmore's position became less secure. The people could not be depended upon long to hold their tempers in check, and should they be driven to storming the Palace, the Governor might find himself a prisoner in merciless hands. There was no question that the odds were against him, yet his defiance was whole-hearted, and in his robust body there was no vestige of fear, though he would have cause to know it if he did not alter his policy of dealing with the Virginians. Perhaps, Randolph thought, a little fear in his heart would save the situation.

With elaborate formality and obvious eagerness to be rid of the emissary, Dunmore escorted him to the head of the stairs and begged him to repeat accurately his message to the Assembly. Scarcely had Randolph descended to the hall than Dunmore summoned Captain Foy. His aide and secretary had been right again. Bluff, bluff—that was all the threats of the people amounted to. But Foy's reassurance would be welcome.

The crowd on the green welcomed the sight of Randolph emerging from the Palace. With ominous restraint he replied to many of the questions demanded by the spokesmen before he entered his carriage. Entreating the populace to be calm and to allow the Assembly to guide them, he drove off to deliver the Governor's reply.

Perspiration rolled down his cheeks from his temples and a long pent-up sigh blew through his rounded lips. He took his handkerchief out again and mopped his face freely. With a quick catching at his heart, he thought of the gathering on the green. The people

had begun to scatter as he drove off, but would it be possible to reassure them so easily the next time? He and Robert Nicholas had worked fast and hard to avert trouble. Now that he could look back on the first dreadful hours of the morning, he wondered if the Governor realized just how near he had come to bringing on a violent outbreak of war.

2

WHEN news of the Governor's seizure of the gunpowder reached Carter Braxton at Chericoke, he felt deeply disturbed—so deeply that he could neither segregate nor control his confused emotions. In his heart he was committed to the patriot cause, as he would prove when his hand was forced, but it was indeed difficult to see his father-in-law aligned against him. Not that Colonel Corbin would blame him for his sentiments. No man, on whatever side he stood, could condone the manner in which Dunmore had chosen to remove the powder, or his sheer stupidity in exhausting the patience of the people.

It seemed ironical that he should be forced, in proving his loyalty to the Colony, to hurt the one person in all the world he wished to spare. His relationship to Colonel Corbin would place him under a cloud of suspicion—and his family would come within its shadow. He had seen in Elizabeth's face at breakfast that morning signs of the bewilderment and worry she tried to conceal from him. Her father, whose duty as a member of the King's Council had so far brought him into the pleasantest association with the Governor, and equally amicable touch with the people of the Colony, would now force him into the unpopular and perhaps dangerous status of a Tory. If only there were still hope of some kind of settlement; if only the Colonel and the rest of the Council could persuade the Governor to act with discretion! But perhaps discretion would be too late, now. There was Patrick Henry in Hanover with his volunteers, waiting for a single slip to cry "War" to the Virginians. This might be the slip he awaited. Braxton's anxious thoughts sped to Sheldon, who would so easily be led by Henry's stimulating personality and convictions—led, it might be, into an act he would

regret more deeply than he could possibly realize in the heat of the general excitement.

He went to his desk and picked up his quill. It was some minutes before the words would come which he felt would impress Sheldon with the importance of acting upon honesty of conviction rather than emotions. When he had sanded the letter and read it through, he sent it off at once by one of his servants. Time was too precious to trust the post. Henry might act at once.

Braxton's letter reached Sheldon shortly after a courier had galloped into Fredericksburg with the news from Williamsburg. The town rose in a fever of resentment. Patrick Henry's prophetic words spoken in St. John's reechoed like a clarion call, strengthened by the bitter truth that war had come even sooner than the most pessimistic had dared to predict. The war of policies had finally given way before the clash of arms, and it would not find Fredericksburg straying in the footsteps of others. The militia rushed together, dispatching couriers in every direction to summon those who were away from the neighborhood. Then came the word that Peyton Randolph and Robert Carter Nicholas had extracted a promise from the Governor that the powder would be restored if needed. Reluctantly, the militia disbanded, discarded their green hunting shirts, and laid down their muskets. But their suspicions and doubts did not subside. Warily, they kept their eyes on Williamsburg and were not surprised when, on the day following the seizure of the gunpowder and Dunmore's subsequent ambiguous promise, they heard of the message which the Governor had sent, after a fretful night, to Dr. Pasteur, the Mayor of Williamsburg. There was no repetition of the fine promises, nor further reference to the rumored uprising in Surrey. His Lordship, on the contrary, took the bull by the horns and proclaimed that if any insult were offered to Captain Foy, his secretary, or to Captain Collins, he would declare freedom to the slaves and lay the town in ashes. Furthermore, he added, he could depopulate the whole country.

As both Captain Foy and Captain Collins were walking the streets of Williamsburg without the slightest molestation at the very moment Dunmore's message was received, the proclamation amounted to insult. But still the Williamsburgers kept their peace.

On this day Sheldon replied to Braxton's letter :

"Your kind advice reached me in Hanover simultaneously with news of the Governor's theft of the powder—for that is what it was. Could anyone doubt his convictions now? Believe that I am firm in mine, and that I care nothing for the consequences. Do you think that my judgment of Lord Dunmore was rashly emotional? He has behaved like the coward that he is, cringing in the Palace behind his sailors and the cannon he has set up in the courtyard, and we hear he has muskets lying on the Palace floor, loaded and primed. I do hope, sir, as you do, that we will not be plunged into a general war, but I hope it will be because Dunmore has been driven from Virginia and some sort of sanity restored to the Ministry. I would be obliged to you for some direct news. Ours comes by express but I feel there is much we do not hear. I am writing from Fredericksburg. Will stayed in Hanover while I returned here to sue for peace again with Aunt Florrie. Even the Governor's last outrage failed to move her to the patriot cause. I fear she is hopeless. This evening I am going back to Hanover. Will and I have lodgings at Mr. Smith's Tavern."

Sheldon left Fredericksburg as the militia began to assemble—more than six hundred of them, mounted. When he arrived at Smith's Tavern, he found that Will had packed their saddle-bags and laid out his fringed hunting shirt and trousers.

"You can't go on wearing those clothes. You're a soldier again, Sheldon, and you must wear the clothes of a soldier. The rumor is we may be called out at any minute." Will leaned against the window sill as Sheldon exchanged his broadcloth for buckskins.

"You're right, Will. And I reckon we'll have our fill of soldiering this time. Men are pouring into Fredericksburg, and it's said they're going to march on Williamsburg and force the Governor to return the powder. They've sent a letter to Colonel Washington asking his approval."

"Why do they have to ask him?"

"I reckon because he's really our Commander-in-Chief."

"If he doesn't give his approval, are they going to disband the militia until things get so bad they're forced to fight?" A look of angry disgust flared up in Will's eyes.

Sheldon smiled and drew his shirt over his head. "If we don't fight today, we'll fight tomorrow, Will. Mr. Henry won't be content with idle threats."

Will's long body seemed to relax. "I guess you're right at that. An' we're ready!"

3

IT BEGAN to appear as if the storm were to be a series of brief squalls. At the request of the Fredericksburg cavalymen, Mann Page, jr. had ridden for twenty-four hours to reach Williamsburg on the twenty-seventh and inquire of Peyton Randolph if the powder had been replaced in the magazine. In the evening, he left to return to Fredericksburg with Randolph's letter in behalf of the corporation. The advice it contained was the same that Randolph and Nicholas had given to the citizens of Williamsburg. "If we then may be permitted to advise, it is our opinion and most earnest request, that matters be quieted for the present at least; we are firmly persuaded that perfect tranquillity will be speedily restored. By pursuing this course we foresee no hazard, nor even inconvenience, that can ensue. Whereas we are apprehensive, and this we think upon good grounds, that violent measures may produce effects which God only knows the consequences of."

This reply did not have the desired effect upon the Fredericksburg volunteers. The letter, they cried, was dictated by fear, and under Captain Hugh Mercer they would march to Williamsburg and avenge the indignity the Governor had done Virginia. It was high time he and his scheming secretary were driven out of the country.

Sheldon and Will, determined to see for themselves what was going on in Fredericksburg, rode into town on the day of the crisis. At Weedon's they found men eager to put them in touch with events so far.

"What happens now?" Sheldon asked, and Will repeated his question, leaning over the bar with a tankard of beer in his hand.

An oath split the thick, hot air of the room. A reedy militiaman in dirty buckskins joined them unasked, spilling rum down his shirt front as he pushed his way along the bar. A scar the breadth of his brow shone hard and smooth under beads of sweat. With red-rimmed eyes the color of a cat's he stared at Sheldon. "Did I hear you to

ask what happens now?"

Sheldon returned his ill-humored look with a quizzical glance.

"You did," he replied after a pause.

"Well, I'll tell you," the man volunteered. "Mr. Randolph and Mr. Pendleton and Colonel Washington all tell us we must be good little boys and let Dunmore slit our throats for us. We're all to go home, and if our bloody services are needed, they'll let us know." He spat fiercely, then jabbed a grubby forefinger at Sheldon's chest. "I left my farm when there's sowin' to be done, an' now I'm here, I'm stayin' till there's fightin'." Having delivered himself of this declaration, he took a tighter grip on his cup and moved off through the crowd.

In the afternoon, the question of whether to march or to bow to the advice of the Burgesses was put to a vote. One hundred and two deputies appointed a council, had a long and heated discussion of the question, and agreed by a majority of one to bide their time. But they wished it understood that the Governor had not heard the last of them. It was settlement or march to the Capitol.

Out of town, to the nearby fields, marched the fourteen companies of light horse with their arms and equipment. There was an envious expression on Will's face as he sat astride his fretting black horse, watching them ride off to their encampment. The fact that the Council which had voted not to march on Williamsburg had, at the same time, pledged themselves to reassemble whenever it was necessary, did not comfort him in the slightest. Virginia was lying down under the yoke of oppression; she had accepted, with a weak whimper, the violation of her liberties and rights and laws. Here they had gathered, these men—yeomen and gentry, professional fighters, and traders like himself—ready to make any sacrifice asked of them. The spark that had ignited their righteous fury was justification for the war that was bound to come sooner or later. Yet they solemnly allowed it to die out. How could they expect to hold in check men that they called up and sent home almost in the same breath? As far as he was concerned, he was getting tired of all this caution. It seemed as if both sides were ready to risk anything but war; protest, threat, and then withdrawal, was the policy of the Assembly.

There wasn't any sense in his staying around here waiting for war

to begin. He'd go back to Augusta till word came that he was needed. Then, if it suited him to come he would; but, by God, not unless it did!

In spite of Sheldon's persistent pleading, Will prepared for the long trip home. His return was going to be leisurely, and when he got back to Augusta, he'd see about building another room to his house. The Pike men would help him, and if Sheldon wanted to come out, there'd be room enough for him and anyone who came with him.

"How soon are you going?" Sheldon asked, still reluctant to believe that Will would risk missing any trouble.

"Tomorrow at sunup. Augusta's mighty pretty in the spring. You ought to come, too, Sheldon."

"Not me! I don't want to miss anything."

Will was cleaning his rifle. He ran the cloth to the end of the slender barrel and paused. There was something that had been bothering him; something he might as well say right off, he thought, then forget about it. But his words, when they came out, were halting, and caused a tide of color to rise in his brown face.

"Colonel Braxton said something, Sheldon—he was talkin' about it at Chericoke— It was about you gettin' married. I've been wonderin'—"

"You were wondering if I was going to abandon the cause after all I've said about it and go back to Shipley with a wife?"

"That's right," Will confessed. "I reckoned that we could go on fightin' together till everything was settled, then maybe you'd see there was land in the West better'n the Tidewater." He gazed thoughtfully at his large toughened hands, rubbed one slowly over the other. "Even if you got married— You said yourself you might. An' that's why you didn't want to sell Shipley."

"Did I? Well, I'm not going to. I might have." He got up restlessly and moved to the window. Leaning against the frame he looked out, but all he could see was his own dim reflection in the glass. Squinting, he tried to see through it. Suddenly he turned around facing Will and saw that his friend was watching him closely; that there was not inquisitiveness in his expression but deep and puzzled concern. Not for anything would Will ask him for his confidence. That day at St. John's, he had taken him by the arm

and walked him quietly home, knowing certainly that something was wrong, but never alluding to it in any way. Will had been through much with him in the short time they had known each other. But how could he understand about Evelyn when he didn't know her? Sheldon couldn't say to Will, she is so beautiful that the sight of her would make any man catch his breath, because he was certain that this was not so. Evelyn's beauty was as inexplicable as her moods and to have fallen under her spell was to suffer a torment of longing.

He began to grow desperate with his thoughts. These things belonged to the lean-faced, swarthy man whose arm she had taken at the church with such obvious pleasure. Suddenly he said, holding his hands out before him and studying his long fingers, "I never thought that I could ever kill a man with my bare hands, Will, but I think, now, that I could."

Will looked at him in startled bewilderment, then after an oath Sheldon had never heard him use before, he cried, "Either we get out o' here and find out what's causin' all the noise downstairs, or you tell me what you're thinkin' about, sittin' there like a bloody mummy. I don't mind sayin' I can't sit in this chair any longer watchin' you put yourself through hell!"

Sheldon's brows rose in feigned shock, then he laughed loud and long. After a while, Will's expression of exhausted patience prompted him to reply, "I confess, what I said didn't make much sense. 'Twas the end of my thoughts. Now let's see what the noise is about."

In the tap-room they found men congregated around the proprietor who was reading for himself what they had reported to him from the *Virginia Gazette* of April twenty-ninth. Crowding into the center of the circle, Sheldon and Will read over his shoulder. The report was dated Wednesday morning, near ten o'clock, and had come from Watertown, New England.

"To all friends of American Liberty, be it known that this morning, before the break of day, a brigade consisting of 1,000 or 1,200 men landed at Phipp's Farm at Cambridge, and marched to Lexington, where they found a company of our colony militia in arms, upon whom they fired without any provocation, and killed six men and wounded four others. By an express from Boston, we find another brigade are now upon their march from Boston, supposed to

be about one thousand. The bearer, Trail Bissel, is charged to alarm the country quite to Connecticut and all persons are desired to furnish him with fresh horses as they may be needed.

J. Palmer—one of the Committee."

The sharp little eyes of the proprietor followed Sheldon's as they moved from line to line of the report. "Did you read the P.S.?" he barked.

"Haven't got that far."

"I'll tell you what it says. Four thousand of our troops surrounded the first brigade, who were on a hill in Lexington, and there the fighting went on. Fifty of our men were killed and one hundred and fifty of the regulars up to the time the express came away. It says every man who is fit and willing ought to go." He pointed to the sentence. "Right here." Then he looked around at the faces of the company, before he bent his head to the *Gazette* again. "The regulars in Concord burned the court-house and took two pieces of cannon. They tried to hold Concord Bridge but they had to retreat to Lexington." With that he slapped the paper down on the bar and began to harangue the men. Sheldon picked up the paper, edged out of the circle, and walked over to a table in the corner of the room. He wanted to read the news again, calmly. There must be some explanation of the battle; some reason assigned to the sudden outbreak of hostilities. But he could find none.

Then, like a sudden and violent wind blowing open an insecure door, a courier from Hanover stamped into the tavern. "You've heard the news?" he asked the men who pressed around him. "Here's more for you. Mr. Henry summons all the Hanover Volunteers to meet him tomorrow at New Castle."

Sheldon sprang from his seat in the corner, dropping the *Gazette* at his feet, and confronted the courier. "Can you tell us what the fighting was about at Lexington?"

Someone handed the courier a tankard of ale which he seized upon thirstily. Before he answered he took a deep gulp. "Sure. General Gage tried to take the powder from Concord just like Dunmore did here—only he didn't get away with it. Not yet, anyhow."

Sheldon's jaw dropped. So that was it! The accepted method of colonial subjugation. They couldn't even make a fair fight out of it.

Will took up the questioning in his slow drawl. "What's Henry

going to do with us at New Castle? Lecture us on our rights, then send us home? Or are we gonna fight this time?"

"I reckon he wants to take Dunmore by the throat before it's too late," the courier said, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. "You from Hanover?" he asked, abruptly.

Will nodded. "I am now. One of the Volunteers, sick of all this talk about fightin' an' doin' nothin'."

The courier drained his glass. "You'll get all the fightin' you want this time, if I got any nose for trouble. I'm ridin' a long way to-night to beat up the Volunteers. Time I was goin'."

Turning on his heel he left the tavern, slamming the door behind him. Pounding hooves echoed through the stillness of the night. Within the tavern, pandemonium brought every guest from his room. With wide-eyed horror they heard the news. It had come at last—the war that had been avoided for so long by timely excuses and flimsy reasoning.

Sheldon and Will, gathering their belongings together and sending word for their horses to be brought, prepared to set out for New Castle on Pamunkey River. It would be a twelve hours' ride, very likely, but this time they were going to be in on the excitement from the start.

The crowd in the tap-room came to the door to see them off. A broad grin creased Will's face but Sheldon's was sober as he sat astride Nero. To Sheldon, their departure was symbolic of new freedom. In all parts of the Colony men would be packing saddle-bags and riding off, as he and Will were doing, to join in the same struggle.

All during the night the thought kept recurring to him that they were Americans, as Mr. Henry had said, fighting for a country that could only be called "America" when it was delivered from the yoke of British tyranny.

They arrived at New Castle in the early morning and found the town crowded with volunteers who surrounded the solitary tavern. At the plain on which New Castle was built, with its scattering of houses and a few imposing buildings, militiamen were still arriving, falling in at once with the high-spirited enthusiasm of the already assembled troops. They did not have long to wait for Henry. He rode into New Castle to address them with face so grim and eyes so sharp and defiant that no man missed the purport of his coming.

This was Henry the fighter—the Henry of St. John’s—riding in on the tide of his predictions. The men watched him with senses alert, eyes fastened on his face, nerves tight with the foreboding of war. As he commenced to speak to them, they moved in about him, until the nearest were gazing up into his face.

Passionately he described to them how the British Ministry had sunk so low as to reduce the colonies to subjugation by robbing them of all the means of defending themselves. They had tried in the north at Lexington and failed; they had tried in the south at Williamsburg—should they be permitted to succeed here? The moment had come when the colonists were to decide whether to live free and hand down the noble inheritance to their children, or to become hewers of wood and drawers of water to those lordlings, who were themselves the tools of a corrupt and tyrannical Ministry.

Cries of “No, never!” forced him to pause and he saw in the faces of his listeners the resolution he had hoped for so desperately. These men were ready for the test. He outlined his plan, and saw bright fire kindled in their eyes. It would be easy for them, by a rapid and vigorous movement, to compel the restoration of the powder, or to make a reprisal on the King’s revenues in the hands of the Receiver-General.

A stir of excited talk began among the militia. Men nodded to one another, beat their fists on their hands and defied anyone to stop them.

Henry went on, determined to paint the complete picture. This move would balance the account, and the Hanover Volunteers would have the opportunity of striking the first blow in this Colony in the cause of American liberty.

A concerted cry of approval rose on the warm spring air. Captain Meredith sprang to the forefront of the inflamed gathering and offered to resign his leadership in favor of Mr. Henry. So loud and insistent was the acclamation that Henry, at first declining, was forced to accept the commission and to don the hunting shirt that marked him as their leader. Meredith accepted a lieutenancy, and plans for immediate action were formed. Ensign Parke Goodall would take sixteen men, mounted, and make at once for Laneville to demand from Colonel Corbin three hundred and thirty pounds

in restitution for the powder. If Corbin had a mind to refuse, they would take him prisoner until he thought better of it. Treating him with respect if it should prove necessary to arrest him, they were to bring him to Doncastle's Ordinary, where Goodall, whatever happened, was to join the main body. Henry would proceed to Doncastle's at once with the rest of the militia.

Of all the men, only one could not join in hearty approbation of the plans. That man was Sheldon, who heard with deep misgivings of the intention to march to Laneville. The blame for the affair was Dunmore's. Let him suffer the consequences. When he heard his name read out as one of those chosen to accompany Parke Goodall, he turned to Will with a protesting cry.

"I can't do it! There are hundreds of men here. Why should I go, when I am, perhaps, the only one who has strong reasons for not wanting to march against Colonel Corbin. He would never forget my part in this, Will. You take my place. Surely it would make no difference to Goodall!"

Will rubbed the blue stubble on his chin. Thoughtfully he replied, "It would make no difference, Sheldon, but that is not important. It is what they'd accuse you of, that worries me. Colonel Corbin may be your friend, but he is a Loyalist. No one's goin' to tell you you can't have a Loyalist for a friend, but when it comes to refusin' to act against him in a just cause—"

"But the cause isn't just, Will! Colonel Corbin didn't steal the powder!"

"True," Will agreed. "But he is the Receiver-General and he's got the money we want for the powder. It is a just cause, Sheldon. If you don't pay for what you take, it's stealin', whether the Governor does it or you or me. An' if it's got to be paid for, Colonel Corbin is the man to ask. Now that's the truth of it."

Sheldon could make no answer to Will's simple logic, but his emotions rebelled against taking any part in the movement. The very thought of facing the Colonel and Mrs. Corbin as a member of this threatening company of militia chilled his blood. This was more than he had bargained for. But as far as his own future was concerned, there was one fact he could not ignore—if he asked to be excused from the party marching to Laneville, his reasons would be

demanding, and to give them would be to brand himself as a Tory. Friendship would be no excuse for leniency in the minds of men on the rising tide of patriotic fanaticism. He would have to go.

4

SHELDON rode to Laneville in the rear of the detachment that followed the Pamunkey to West Point and crossed over to the Laneville road. The delay in getting the men under way after the meeting put them on the road well after sundown, and by the time they reached their destination, Colonel Corbin's household had retired. Remembering his orders to treat Corbin with respect, Goodall stationed a guard around the vast brick house to await the break of day. Sheldon was billeted with the rest of the detachment in the stable. Ordered to make as little noise as possible, they amused themselves by taking stock of the Colonel's horses until one of the men produced a pair of dice, got down on the beaten dirt floor and began to roll them. Rapidly the men drew round, sinking to their knees and matching coin for coin.

Sheldon stayed out of the game. He was in no mood for gambling and he wanted to have another look at Jenny. It was strange that horses always knew when something was wrong. Ever since the men had come near the stable, they had been whinnying and kicking the sides of their stalls. Jenny was tugging wide-eyed against her halter rope, her nostrils distended and quivering. Sheldon looked back over his shoulder at the men on the floor. Most of them had a two days' growth of beard, and their uniforms were as dirty as their faces. Over the dice their expressions were tense and greedy, muscles tightening in every jaw until the dice lay still. It would take very little resistance by Corbin or his slaves to arouse the unreasoning passions of these men who would burn his stable and house and outbuildings in the name of patriotism and boast about it afterward. The fact that Corbin was a gentle and reasonable man who was demanding no more than they, in his right to hold his convictions, would not impress them tonight. Aroused as they were, right would be as these men thought.

Outside the stable, the slaves, alarmed by the arrival of the de-

tachment, were frightened into silence. No harm, the guards assured them, would come to their master or themselves, so long as they obeyed orders. Mumbling fearfully, they crept back to their quarters.

At daybreak, the detachment was called to attention and the guard returned to the ranks. Goodall approached the river door of the greathouse and paused. It had begun to open, as he moved toward it, and now Mrs. Corbin and her two daughters, Alixia and Laetitia, walked out to the head of the stone steps. For a moment the three women stood close together—the girls pale and frightened—looking down at the upturned faces of the men. In Mrs. Corbin's calm and dignified figure, Goodall saw no sign of fear. With a gesture of complete assurance, shared by neither of her plain daughters, she told him that Colonel Corbin was in Williamsburg, but that they were welcome to search the house if they wished.

Goodall made her a deep bow. "I don't think that will be necessary, ma'am. I am truly sorry for the intrusion."

Mrs. Corbin gave him a charming smile. Only her eyebrows, lifted above challenging eyes, expressed the faintest mockery.

As the detachment swung around and prepared to mount, Sheldon found himself almost directly beneath her gaze. He thought she started slightly. Certainly Laetitia nudged Alixia and whispered to her behind her hand. He wished that he could vault into the saddle and ride off without returning their glances, but that would be an admission of shame. He was doing his duty and they must know it.

Removing his hat, he walked his horse to the foot of the steps.

"I am sorry to pay a call under such circumstances," he said, looking at Mrs. Corbin and avoiding the shocked gaze of her daughters. "Soldiers cannot choose their duties, else I would not be here." He smiled slowly. "Will you tell Colonel Corbin I am pleased he was away from home?" Then he jammed his hat on his head, mounted, and spurred his horse up to the retreating detachment.

When they formed their junction that night with the main body at Doncastle's Ordinary, about sixteen miles from Williamsburg, they found that the original corps had been powerfully increased by companies from all sides who had thrown themselves under Henry's banner. Back with Will, Sheldon learned that no sooner

had Henry begun his march to Williamsburg with his band of one hundred and fifty men than the news spread like wildfire. Every few miles volunteers had flowed into the main stream like swollen tributaries. They had marched to Park's Spring the evening Goodall had gone to Laneville and had reached New Kent Court House the following day. John Norton was waiting there for Henry, sent by his father-in-law, Robert Carter Nicholas, to find out how far the volunteers intended to go.

Will chuckled. "I reckon they're gettin' nervous down in Williamsburg. Henry detained Norton and they sent another messenger last night. They could have saved themselves the trouble, because Henry brought us right on here to Doncastle's. What happened at Corbin's?"

"Nothing," Sheldon answered shortly. "He wasn't there." His eyes fell on a group of men walking from the stable into the light of the open tavern door. They were uniformed alike in green hunting shirts, with knives and tomahawks in their belts, but what held Sheldon's attention were the words "Liberty or Death" in white letters across their breasts. He nudged Will. "Who are they?"

"Culpepper Minute-men. They got a fine flag, too, with a coiled rattlesnake on it and 'Don't tread on me' written underneath. They're a strong lot. I reckon there's about fifteen hundred of us here. Been pourin' in like water since y'all left."

The men were moving in a constant stream in and out of the Ordinary. By the time Will and Sheldon pushed their way through the door, there wasn't enough left of Doncastle's roast turkey and wild duck to shake a stick at. Sheldon and Will had a quart of arrack punch between them and then Sheldon began standing the militiamen to rumbullion until Will tugged at his arm and said it was time someone stood him a drink. Sheldon's head was buzzing fit to split but he was having a fine time. Someone put a glass of rum into his hand and he swallowed it in three gasping draughts. The liquid burned his throat and ran like fire through his veins. He'd like to have Dunmore here right now, fight it out for Virginia with bare fists. That was the way things ought to be settled. Where was Patrick, anyhow? He'd tell him. He asked Will.

Will pointed to the room across the hall.

"In there. I think Meredith is with him. If you're thinkin' of

seein' him, Sheldon, better wait'll you cool off."

"I'm all right—just in the right frame of mind to renew our acquaintance."

Will tossed off his drink. "I'll wait for you here. I'm not finished—not quite." He banged his leather cup on the bar.

Sheldon found Patrick Henry in earnest conversation with Sam Meredith and a third man whose clothes looked as if he had been a long time in the saddle. He stood in the doorway for a moment, then began quietly to back away when Henry lifted his head, and seeing him, smiled.

"Come in," he called, and as Sheldon walked none too steadily toward him, Henry studied his face with puckered brows. "You came to see me at Scotchtown last winter, but I'm hanged if I can rightly say your name."

"Sheldon Hilliard, sir," Sheldon reminded him, surprised that he could remember it himself.

"Of course. Hilliard. Nicholas Hilliard's son. And you had a friend with you—Will something-or-other—who was in Dunmore's War. You fought there, too. It all comes back to me now."

"McKee—Will McKee—here now—one of the Hanover Volunteers, like myself."

"So you did enlist. I wondered after you left if you really would." He addressed Meredith in a serious voice. "Such lads are the mainstay of Virginia, and this is excellent training for them. Teach 'em how to deal with Royal Governors who have a mind to smother us with oppression." His broad mouth stretched in a warm smile. "Take a seat, Hilliard. This is Mr. Meredith and Mr. Wade. Mr. Wade has come with further news from Williamsburg. The Governor is threatening to call up the marines from York. I find it very interesting, for the last I heard, His Lordship was preparing to flee to the *Fowey*. I believe Lady Dunmore has already gone with her family, hasn't she, Wade?"

"Yes, sir," Wade affirmed.

"I am glad of that, although no harm will come to any of them if they accede to our demands. I have already sent Holt Richardson and Norton to Williamsburg with that information. They are also to request a valuation of the military stores. There is some question as to just how much powder was removed. What I do next depends

entirely on the Governor's reply, which, according to my calculations, should arrive at any moment. In the meantime, I could do with something to eat. Will you join us, Mr. Hilliard?"

"With pleasure, sir," Sheldon replied, and wondered where Doncastle would find food fit for Captain Henry after the inroads of the troops upon his provisions.

His mouth began to water when, in less than half an hour, he saw what Doncastle had managed to produce: two ducks roasted in a chafing-dish, cold ham and turkey, spinach and greens, and hoe cake to fill up the gaps.

"This will satisfy me," Henry assured the proprietor as he carved the ducks. "Now I think a gallon of your best ale—"

Doncastle hurried back to the tap-room and returned in a moment with two half-gallon pitchers. Foam, spilling over the edges, dotted his footsteps.

The table had scarcely been cleared before Holt Richardson returned. Henry sprang to his feet as he came into the room, and led him over to the fireplace. "You have the valuation?" he asked, and Richardson nodded. His face was drawn with fatigue, and his hand, holding the valuation, trembled. "About three hundred and sixty pounds sterling for fifteen half-barrels of powder." He handed the figures to Henry, who sat down at the desk by the window and examined the paper.

"Does the Governor propose paying for it?"

"Colonel Braxton is on his way here now."

"Braxton!" Henry exploded.

Richardson sank into a chair and extended his legs. "Yes. He has the bills for the powder."

"I won't accept them from him!" Henry cried. "What is his endorsement worth? He's no better than the worst of the Tories!"

"But, sir—" Richardson spread his hands in despair. "What are you going to do?"

At that moment Carter Braxton appeared in the doorway, pausing for a moment to survey the company. When he saw Sheldon, his quickly raised eyebrows and the mingling of surprise and regret in his weary blue eyes caused the boy an agony of embarrassment. But Braxton's glance shifted rapidly, and during the rest of the time he

was in the room, his eyes never turned in Sheldon's direction.

He walked straight to Henry and bowed. When the eyes of the two men met, there was a hard, uncompromising glint in Henry's. He remained seated in pointed disrespect. "I was asked by Colonel Corbin to come here and tell you that he has been made acquainted with the object of the Volunteers," Braxton explained, his face beginning to flush, the muscles in his jaw twitching with resentment at the insult Henry had offered him. "I am to make satisfaction to you for the military stores according to their valuation, which I believe has been set at three hundred and sixty pounds sterling."

He paused, and Henry waited in icy silence for him to continue. "I have here bills drawn by Colonel Corbin on Hanberry of London, which I trust will be acceptable to you."

Henry gazed at him loftily and, dropping his hands on the arm of his chair, replied, "I am afraid, sir, that they are not acceptable."

"But I shall endorse them myself," Braxton cried. Sheldon, watching him miserably from the corner to which he had slowly retreated, thought Braxton was going to explode with wrath.

Henry went on, implacably: "Colonel Braxton, I am not suspicious of your ability to pay, but of your political attachments. Lord Dunmore, I hear, is considering flight in the *Fowey* and I am sure he is ready to protect and carry off any person or persons friendly to his views. Your father-in-law is an agent of the Crown and you are the agent of Corbin. Now what is to prevent the drawer and endorser of the bill from disappearing with Dunmore?" He paused to let the words take effect. "In that case the main object of the Volunteers—compensation for the powder—would be defeated. These men have come determined to attain that object."

Braxton was silent, his face a dull crimson. As he stood there, the color gradually paled, leaving his skin as transparent as parchment. Sheldon wanted to cry out that no one was a nobler man nor greater patriot than Colonel Braxton, but something in Braxton's face arrested him. He appeared to be making a stern effort to compose himself, as if he were realizing that in the course of his duty he would likely face greater mortification than this.

When he spoke again, his voice was perfectly controlled. "Will you take Colonel Nelson as endorser?" The faintest sarcasm was in the question.

"I will take any responsible character of known attachment to the Revolutionary cause."

Braxton made him a stiff bow. "I'll go for him now." With rapid stride he left the room, indifferent to the slight bows of Richardson and Wade.

It was dawn of May fourth when Braxton returned with Thomas Nelson. Meeting him on the way from Williamsburg, he had described the scene with Henry and the temper of the men which Henry's attitude almost certainly reflected. But when they arrived together at Doncastle's, Henry ran out of the tavern bareheaded and greeted Nelson with such warmth that the latter threw a teasing glance at Braxton.

The three men entered Doncastle's together and in a moment the affair was settled. Nelson endorsed the bills and again Henry sat down at the desk by the window, but this time he wrote:

"Doncastle's Ordinary, New Kent,
May 4, 1775

Received from the Honourable Richard Corbin, Esq., His Majesty's Receiver-General, £330, as a compensation for the Gunpowder lately taken out of the public Magazine by the Governor's order; which money I promise to convey to the Virginia Delegates at the General Congress, to be under their direction laid out in Gunpowder for the Colony's use, and to be stored as they shall direct, until the next Colony Convention, or General Assembly, unless it shall be necessary, in the meantime, to use the same in defence of this Colony. It is agreed, that in case the next Convention shall determine that any part of the said money ought to be returned to His Majesty's Receiver-General, that the same shall be done accordingly.

Patrick Henry, junior."

Sam Meredith and Parke Goodall, who had come into the room as he was writing, witnessed the receipt, and then, for the first time, Henry bowed to Braxton as the men parted.

Word of the settlement went quickly through the ranks of the militia, followed by the rumor that they would be immediately disbanded. The success of their action filled them with an exhilarating sense of pride. Surely this was a forerunner of complete liberty and the thought sent the men to their bottles again and again, toasting Henry, liberty, and themselves. Sheldon sat on the ground against

the stable wall and watched the men. He envied them, and wished that he, too, could feel as dissociated from the other side of the picture; that he could forget the look on Mrs. Corbin's face and the disappointment in Colonel Braxton's eyes. But he couldn't forget any more than he could sleep. Most of the night he had wandered about the encampment looking for Will, and then, in the early morning, when he heard that Braxton had returned with Nelson, he had hovered about the Ordinary entrance, hoping for a chance to speak to him. But when Braxton and Nelson left, Henry came out to see them off, and Sheldon could not find the courage to follow after them. There was little he could say to Braxton, except to explain that by involving him and Colonel Corbin, the affair had assumed proportions of which he had never dreamed. Had he known that this would happen, he never would have joined the Volunteers, until their attack was directed at Dunmore alone.

Will discovered him against the stable wall and sank down beside him, filled with whiskey and enthusiasm; but he soon saw that Sheldon was in no mood to be jovial. Impatiently he jerked to his feet and went off to join his companions of the previous night—boisterous, good-humored militiamen from the Culpepper company.

After muster, Sheldon walked into the tavern. The Volunteers, awaiting further orders, pressed about the building, and he had difficulty making his way through them. He found Doncastle in his office, poring over his accounts. His sharp glance of annoyance told Sheldon that he was disturbing the usually genial Boniface.

"I want you to take a message to Mr. Henry," Sheldon said.

Doncastle's face softened. "Ah, you are the young gentleman who had supper with Mr. Henry last night."

"I am," Sheldon replied abruptly, "but that has nothing to do with my message. Will you ask Captain Henry if he will grant me the honor of a few moments' conversation?"

Doncastle made two quick bows, rubbing his hands together and fixing his eyes curiously on Sheldon. "Do you wish to wait here?" he asked.

Sheldon nodded, and sat down on the edge of a long stretcher table.

In a few minutes the proprietor returned with Henry's reply that he would see him.

Sheldon wasn't certain how he was going to approach this interview, but he presented himself at Henry's room with the determination, at all events, to make his position clear.

Hardly had he accepted the chair Henry offered him than he began to speak. His voice sounded unsteady to his own critical ears. "Sir, I've felt bound to tell you since last night that Colonel Braxton is my friend. He has treated me like his own son since my father died, and I have often been his guest at Chericoke. Hearing what you said to him last night, about his Tory sentiments and his connection with Colonel Corbin, I wanted to tell you that you were mistaken, but I felt it was no place of mine to speak at such a time."

Henry's expression did not alter by the flicker of a lash as Sheldon spoke, and it was an expression not calculated to give him confidence. But he had to finish what he had come to say. After that, Henry could do what he pleased with him.

"Colonel Braxton is a Conservative, sir, but that does not lessen his loyalty to the colonies. It was he whom I first asked about joining the militia. He told me to make sure of my sentiments and act accordingly; that is what he has done. It was what he did when he made the motion for a general Congress of the colonies that labeled him as a patriot, sir, as you must admit."

The gentle smile that crept over Henry's face gave Sheldon encouragement to go on. More boldly he concluded, "And there's no denying that Colonel Braxton did procure the money for the powder!"

Henry rose from his chair and walked to the window, motioning Sheldon to join him. Pointing down at the men gathered below, he said, "Those Volunteers left their homes and their farms to follow me. If the theft of the gunpowder had led to war, they would have made any sacrifice—made it in the name of liberty. You are one of them, but where you are unlike them is in permitting your personal sentiments to guide your conscience. In war, Mr. Hilliard—or what might well be its prelude—a soldier cannot question the orders of his superiors. To do so is insubordination—the unforgivable weakness in a soldier." His voice had been stern; now it softened a little. "I appreciate your affection for Colonel Braxton, and I admire your loyalty toward him. But as a politician, I know him better than you

do, and I cannot admire him. He has the faults of the aristocracy in a land where equality must and will be the supreme basis for judgment. He is not a true patriot. There is the core of my suspicion of him."

The men beneath the window became blurred figures before Sheldon's vision. Was there always to be this violent, inner conflict? Could he never fight for a cause with a free mind? Of one thing he had been certain—to fight Dunmore was to fight with full strength of conviction; to march under Henry's banner was guarantee of a just principle. But now that Colonel Braxton had entered the picture, and he had heard Henry denounce him, he realized that even the fairest of men could be swayed by personal feelings. He couldn't believe that Henry really thought Braxton would flee with Dunmore and the Loyalists to the *Fowey*, yet he had jeopardized settlement for that very reason.

Patrick Henry's voice drew him back from his disturbing thoughts. "You are a young man, Mr. Hilliard; I think I understand your problem and I like you, so I am going to give you a bit of advice. You must turn your emotions into an impersonal channel; examine the principles of this struggle dispassionately—the desire for liberty and full rights. Keep them before you as the high-road toward the perfect state. Where the road is cluttered with obstacles, be they personal or material, break through them relentlessly. When your hand falters, I would advise you to go back to Shipley and leave the fate of the Colony to sterner men."

To sterner men! What wouldn't he willingly give for the good of the Colony? Hadn't he risked his life as much as any other man at Point Pleasant? Hadn't he been one of the first to join the Hanover Volunteers? Why then should his sincerity be doubted because he questioned Henry's right to humiliate Colonel Braxton? He would follow any leader of Virginia's struggle for her rights—he particularly wanted to follow Henry—but he would not follow blindly, and would take no man's opinion of justice but his own. Perhaps he had been away from the center of things too long; had heard too much news second-hand. He would go to Williamsburg and see for himself what was happening.

"I hear, sir, that we are to be disbanded," he said to Henry, when the silence between them had grown strained.

Henry's eyes strayed out of the window to the men, restless in their inactivity. "That depends—" he answered slowly. "I have written to Peyton Randolph, offering our services to escort the public treasury to a place of safety, if he feels that there is any danger. I am waiting for his answer. If he does not require us, then we shall disband."

There was nothing more to say, and Sheldon began to feel that his presence was becoming unwelcome. Henry was fidgeting nervously with his cuff buttons and craning his neck to peer up the road at every sound of horses' hooves.

With a murmur of thanks for the time Henry had given him, Sheldon saluted briskly and went from the room, closing the door softly behind him.

The following morning the Volunteers started back to their homes. Will, complaining that, as usual, there had been no fighting, announced that he was really going to Augusta this time, and nothing but the sound of gun-fire would stop him. He and Sheldon rode out from Doncastle's together and parted at the river.

"When are you coming back?" Sheldon asked, feeling a sudden sense of impending loneliness.

"When there's fightin' to be done," Will took off his cap and ran his long fingers through his hair. "Why don't you go along with me?"

Sheldon shook his head. "I'm going to find out once and for all what they're asking us to fight for."

5

EARLY on the morning of May twenty-eighth, Francis Foutré galloped his horse down Duke of Gloucester Street as if all the devils in hell were after him. Half a block before the Raleigh Tavern, he slowed to a trot, then drew rein before the entrance. Sweat streaked the dust from his temples to his jaws. Where he had wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his shirt there were brown owlsh circles free of dirt, from which he looked wearily about him. God's teeth, but it was a ride from Philadelphia! He tossed the reins and a shilling to the small negro boy who came running to take his horse.

"Give him a hot mash and rub him down well, and there'll be another coin to jingle against that," Foutré promised, swinging a leg over the saddle and jumping to the ground.

"Yassuh, yassuh." The black face beamed.

Foutré lifted his saddle-bags from behind the cantle and, laying them on the ground, stooped to dust off his breeches. "Send these in," he ordered, "and quick."

Foutré strode rapidly into the tavern. The public rooms were deserted save for a solitary man who sat in the parlor with his back to the door, reading the *Virginia Gazette*.

Foutré requested a room, some breakfast and a barber, and followed his host upstairs to what he claimed was the sole remaining room. It was a small room, but a single feature appealed to Foutré—the high four-poster bed. He had ridden hard for three days from Philadelphia in order to spend a day in the company of Evelyn Buford before going on to Norfolk. There was little time to be wasted, with events moving as rapidly as they were, but even the most reliable of couriers should be allowed some pleasure, and he could imagine none greater than the company of Miss Buford.

Left alone, he pulled off his boots and lay down on the bed. All the way to Williamsburg he could think of nothing but the young lady who was so assiduously playing her part for the colonies. He was certain that it irked her to go among the shopkeepers, seeking the information she provided for him, but she could be proud that the conversation with Catharine Rathell led them to Captain Wetherby of the *Caroline*, who was shipping wheat and corn, and anything useful he could lay hands on, up to Gage in Boston. The shipment was seized and fed a good many patriot mouths, and it was to Miss Buford alone that thanks were due.

She was truly a remarkable young woman, but her activities seemed to consume all her thoughts. Time and again he had had it on the tip of his tongue to ask her to ride into the country with him and forget everything but the enchanting beauty of a spring day, but always she discouraged him with talk of Williamsburg and questions about New York and Boston and Philadelphia.

He had so much to tell her if she would only let him. He would not always be flying about the country like this, risking his neck for the Sons of Liberty. Perhaps at the end of this year he would

turn his duties over to someone younger who was imbued with the same spirit that drove him so relentlessly, and confine his own services to New York. How often he had day-dreamed, on his long, fatiguing rides, imagining that the end of his journey would take him to Evelyn's arms. He would say her name aloud to catch the sound of it in his ears.

He had been as brave as most men in the service of his country—no man could deny that—but would he ever have anything when peace came but the memory of his willing service, unless at the end of all this he could turn to Evelyn, knowing she would be beside him always, and that he could build the future on more substantial things than memory. Perhaps then he might be of even greater service to the colonies. Evelyn gave a man ambition to make her proud of him, and a driving force that matched her own; the determination to go beyond it, to give her strength to rest upon.

He did not hear the knock at his door, and the servant who entered with his breakfast found him staring at the ceiling. The man's appearance at the foot of the bed brought him to his feet with a start.

"Why didn't you knock!" he cried.

"I did knock, suh."

"Then put the tray down there—on that table. And when you go downstairs say that I would like hot water—lots of it. And in half an hour the barber, without fail. I have a pressing engagement and I do not want to be delayed by one moment."

Foutré was in high spirits. Bathed, shaved and well-fed, out of his buckskins and into dark blue broadcloth, he felt like singing to the world, and not at all as if he had just paused after an arduous journey. He came down the stairs with springy tread and went into the parlor. If the gentleman he had noticed on his way in was still there, he might have a few minutes' conversation with him over a cup of coffee and find out what had been going on in Williamsburg.

As he entered the room, the man looked up and Foutré saw that he was young, not much over twenty and serious-faced. He noticed, also, a look of ill-concealed surprise in the young man's green eyes before they turned back to the *Gazette*. Foutré took a seat on the other side of the room and picked up a month-old copy of the *William and Mary Quarterly*. For a while he seemed to be ab-

sorbed in what he read but he could feel the young man's eyes were frequently raised to gaze at him over the top of his paper. After a decorous interval, Foutré laid down the *Quarterly* and addressed the stranger.

"Sir, would you consider it presumptuous of me to present myself to you?"

The young man seemed to thrust the *Gazette* eagerly aside as he replied, "Not at all."

"I am Francis Foutré, lately of New York, and very anxious to know how affairs progress here. Will you join me in a cup of coffee?"

"With pleasure, sir. I am Sheldon Hilliard of Henrico." His expression no longer betrayed the surprise of finding in the tavern the one man in all Virginia whose identity he most wanted to discover. The lean, brown face of Foutré had haunted him ever since the day at St. John's, when he had seen Evelyn leave the church on his arm.

Foutré ordered coffee and moved his chair closer to Sheldon's. "How did the people take the return of Lady Dunmore and her family? In New York we hear that they were well received." As he spoke, his eyes appraised the hard frame and strong, earnest face of the young man and set aside the impression for future use.

"The people received them with great satisfaction. I believe they look upon their return as a forerunner of conciliation."

"Conciliation?" Foutré echoed.

"Yes. But I think, personally, that they are misled." Sheldon knew that unless Evelyn had radically changed her sentiments, he was speaking to a patriot.

"In that I agree!" Foutré exclaimed. "There will be no conciliation."

They were silent while the servant put coffee on a small table between them. When Foutré had poured a cup for each of them, they continued their conversation.

"There are many who are still apprehensive of the Governor's intentions," Sheldon informed him. "Shortly after Henry's march, several citizens of this town broke into the magazine and armed themselves very effectively with a considerable amount of the contents. The Governor has been searching for them ever since, and his failure to find them proves, I think, that their protection is strong."

Foutré smiled. "I have the impression that you are of the right party."

"I support the rights of the Colony," Sheldon asserted firmly.

"And I the rights of them all," Foutré said.

Sheldon's look of interest deepened. "How did you leave affairs in the North?"

"They've taught the King what a handful of Colonials can do up in Massachusetts. The farmers were just as surprised as Pitcairn at Lexington, but their success has given them great confidence. It has shaken up the ministry, too. It is rumored they're sending troops from Ireland."

"And how about New York?"

"New York is responding vigorously. The Hudson passes in the Highlands are to be fortified and we've already embargoed a number of vessels in the harbor that were intended for the British in Boston. Our Committee of Safety has not been inactive, either. Early this month they took six hundred stands of arms from the city arsenal and distributed them among the citizens. We are preparing ourselves, and we will not be misled by any overtures of Parliament, but we have, so far, deemed it best to play a defensive hand. Let the Tories fire the first shot and bear the onus. I have an engagement," he added, "otherwise I should like to continue our talk."

He rose from his chair, drained his cup of the last drop of coffee and picked up his hat. "I find it interesting and I should like to know more of your sentiments concerning the details of—shall I say—the ramifications of our defense." Slowly he tugged at the sleeves of his coat, keeping his eyes speculatively on Sheldon.

"Perhaps we will meet again," Sheldon suggested.

"Very likely, and it will be my pleasure, sir, if we do. Now, I must give you good-day."

Sheldon, who had risen with Foutré, bowed and watched his new acquaintance leave the room. Then he returned to his chair and poured himself another cup of coffee. He would have given anything to follow Foutré and discover what business had brought him to Williamsburg. But there were other ways of finding out and he would employ them all. He would start with Colonel Braxton who was returning to Williamsburg with Peyton Randolph tomorrow.

FOUTRÉ walked briskly up Duke of Gloucester Street to Mrs. Emeline Cooper's house. It was well before the dinner hour, but he hoped they would ask him to stay. Then afterwards he might inveigle Evelyn into that ride in the country he had promised himself for so long. They would have several hours together and he could leave that night for Norfolk. If Evelyn were in a receptive mood—He let the knocker fall and almost at once the door was opened. On the heels of the young servant girl who let him into the hall came Mrs. Cooper. Her plump face flushed at sight of him and the excitement betrayed by her pale blue eyes caused him a moment of embarrassment.

"Dear Mr. Foutré," she cried. "How glad I am to see you! When Miss Buford told me you were coming I thought at last we will know what is happening outside Virginia—and here you are! I am sure you want to know where Miss Buford is," she chirped. "She is in the garden and I think she is as excited as a child about your coming. But you mustn't tell her I said so. La, 'twould be a storm if you did." She paused for breath that seemed painful to inhale. "I'll show you to the garden if you wish."

"Please don't bother," Foutré begged. "I know the way quite well."

Mrs. Cooper's face fell with disappointment. She had so wanted to see the meeting of these two.

Undaunted by her disappointment, Foutré bowed and walked through the hall to the back door, across the stone-flagged porch and into the garden. Where the sunlight slanted against a willow in the far corner, Evelyn sat reading. The sight of her slender back and the shapely head with its pile of dark curls forced his breath in sharply. One slim ankle showed beneath the folds of her skirt, bending with rapid little movements of her foot as she tapped the ground.

He wanted to call out to her, but he could not bear to disturb a picture that excited him as the mental picture of her had done on so many long journeys. So he walked across the lawn, and when he was standing behind her, spoke her name in a whisper.

She turned sharply and he could see that his sudden appearance

had startled her, for a pulse began to throb at the base of her throat. "Mr. Foutré!" she cried. "How you frightened me, coming up like that. You've fair taken the breath out of me!"

He bowed deeply without taking his eyes from hers. "I'm truly sorry, but the vision of you, sitting here, was so enchanting that I could not speak before—" A contrite look gave his face a boyish expression that robbed his words of their intended earnestness.

Evelyn returned his gaze with a puzzled smile. He was so strange, this unpredictable courier of the Sons of Liberty; so strange and so impelling. In his stocky figure and sensitive face she found a curious stimulation. At the same time, she felt a nervous response to the restlessness that drove him like the sting of a lash. His eyes still played about her face as if they were incapable of coming to rest on any single feature. Would she ever be able to penetrate their steady depths, and discover the secret thoughts that baffled her? She didn't think he ever meant her to—or anyone else for that matter.

"You are earlier than I expected," she said.

"I'd have been earlier still, had I come when I wished. I have already had several minutes' interesting conversation with a young man I found at the Raleigh Tavern. I was seeking to learn why Williamsburg was so uncommonly quiet."

"The lull before the storm," Evelyn predicted. "Perhaps the storm that has already broken in the North."

He nodded. "'Tis fast sweeping South." For an instant his eyes on hers were unmasked. They burned with a bright, almost fanatical glow. Then he went on: "I bear you the gratitude of our organization for your information about the *Caroline*. The affair had interesting repercussions." He sat down beside her, and would have changed the subject, but she urged him on. "Pray tell me what happened. I have heard no report."

Foutré continued: "We met at the Coffee-house in New York and decided to seize the sloop. Captain Sears advised the people to arm themselves and was arrested and taken before the Mayor for seditious and treasonable action. If you knew him, you'd realize the Mayor had his hands full. Sears refused to give bail and they were about to carry him off to prison. Fortunately"—he smiled—"we were able to take him from the officers. There was quite a celebra-

tion. We bore him through the town in a triumphal march, with band and banners and all the rigmarole. Of course, that was all we needed. The people followed us to battle. We took the City Hall and armed ourselves. Then Lamb and Willett led us to the harbor and we proceeded to embargo every vessel laden with provisions for the British in Boston."

"Do you never see the shadow of the gibbet?" Evelyn asked, with a note of concern that surprised and excited him.

"The shadow of the gibbet is as constant as my own," he smiled. "If that deterred me, I should long ago have taken to the backwoods. But you haven't heard the end. Andrew Elliott, the collector, forbade the landing of a cargo of rum for the patriots, so what did Sears and Lamb do but order the vessel to Cruger's Wharf, land the rum, and cart it to the city. Then they went back to the customhouse, dismissed the employees and closed the building. Other seizures followed and the Loyalists began running like rats. Even Dr. Cooper, from King's College, hid in Stuyvesant's house." He began to laugh. "I tell you, when Gage got busy up in Boston he didn't realize he was sticking a bayonet into a hornet's nest. And how these rebels can fight!"

"What is the Congress doing about it?" Evelyn frowned, and he wished that he had never elaborated on the subject.

"The Congress—" he hesitated. "If the situation seems to them indicative of general war, they will appoint a Commander-in-Chief." Suddenly, he turned to face her. "Evelyn, must we always talk of nothing but the colonies and war and oppression? Do you never wonder at the patience of my love for you and feel the least bit sorry that I have longed for you day and night? You speak of the shadow of the gibbet! I assure you it's not so constant as the torment of this longing. Every mile I ride there is no image but yours before me. Sometimes it is so clear that I feel to reach out would be to touch your face—" He stopped abruptly at the bewilderment in her eyes and a tide of color rushed into his lean cheeks. "You did not know?" he whispered.

She shook her head slowly, and he saw that her folded hands were pressed so tightly the fingers were rigid. He was a fool to tell her like this, but he hadn't been able to stop the flow of his confession. Never could he woo her with the patient elegance of these

Virginia dandies. He wanted her, and that fact could not be disguised by soft phrases and the tender pressure of his lips upon her fingers. He wanted her mouth on his and her body so close that his irrepressible passion would pass to her through him, weaving a pattern of endless union, dispelling worldly things with ecstatic dreams of their own.

"Could there be love for me in your heart?" he asked almost breathlessly.

She put her hand on his so gently that he knew what the answer would be. "I have never thought of loving you," she said, "and believe me, I did not know that you loved me."

"You mean you could not—"

She tightened her fingers on his. "If your love is unrequited, we have that in common, too."

There was a look almost of anger in his dark, incredulous gaze. "Is it possible that you could love someone and he not return it a thousandfold? Could ever a man look at you without loving you?"

She laughed gently at him. "I am not overpowered with admiration, but the one admiring glance which I have sought has been indifferently absent. That is what a woman deserves, I reckon, for confessing her love." At the look of constrained misery in his face, she hurried on, "If you love me, nothing less from me will satisfy you—that I know. But please try to take my affection for you at its real value. You have given me strength and resolution and deepest pleasure in your friendship. I could scarcely await your arrival this morning. But Francis, love is such an unconscionable master that one can have no doubt of it, once it casts its spell." She put her hands on his arms and forced him to look at her. "Does my answer mean that I am to lose you?"

He took her face between his hands, caressing every feature with eyes that were no longer bright and appraising, but misty with baffled longing. His hands were hot on her skin, their insistent pressure sending a warm tingling current through her limbs. She found she could not take her eyes from his as his head bent lower, so close to hers now that his mouth brushed the tip of her nose. A sense of betrayal tried to pierce the fascination with which he bound her, but when she felt the pressure of his lips, she submitted to them weakly, bewildered by the sudden pounding of her pulses. It was

shameful that she should feel in his kiss any fragment of the emotion that Sheldon had stirred in her. Yet his lips, moving warmly and hungrily on hers, sent currents of heat and cold through her limp body.

When he dropped his hands and looked at her as if he expected her to strike him, she could only put trembling fingers to her lips and return his gaze in utter confusion. Her mind flew back to the night she had first met him in her father's house, and she remembered with sudden understanding the warmth and penetration of his glance, and the effort he had made to soothe her ruffled feathers after her quarrel with Eustice. She could see now that his interest in her had not been purely political, nor his admiration confined entirely to her strength of purpose.

When her brain began to clear she found herself pitying Francis, and wishing that her heart were free of Sheldon so that her answer could, with honesty, make him happy. But the thought of a pair of green eyes, young, intense and pleading, framed by copper-colored hair, and a broad, serious mouth that could break suddenly into a warm, teasing smile, banished the wish as it was born. She was as much Sheldon's as if soul and body and mind belonged to him. The fact that he had made no effort to see her after her return to Petersburg, much as it wounded her pride, could not dispel that fact. If she buried her mind in the part she was playing, if she never spoke his name but to herself, and then with angry, bewildered trembling, it was only that she was as stubborn as he, and knew she had been right when she suspected the uncertainty of his emotions. But even so, she could not throw up her head, wish him damned, and accept Francis just because he loved her with the intensity with which she loved Sheldon. That much integrity she owed herself.

Gently she laid her hand on his. "You have not answered my question."

"It will be the same—yet not the same," he replied in a voice that was low and toneless. "Perhaps I should not have confessed my feelings when you gave me no reason to believe you reciprocated them—but now that I have done it, at least I know how futile hope is. You'll never lose me, Evelyn. You have only to command me." His face had gradually assumed its dark, impenetrable

mask. "We will talk of other things. Tell me, have you news for me?"

She folded her hands in her lap and tried to gather her bewildered thoughts into a semblance of order. "Nothing, save that Benjamin Bucktrout will bear watching." She wished desperately that Francis hadn't kissed her, or that his kiss had not affected her so strangely. It was monstrously upsetting. She continued her report, finding the impersonal channel an escape from her confusion. "Catherine Rathell is going to England, and I believe several of the merchants will follow her. The restriction on importation is ruining their trade. But you will see how the Colony supports its delegates when Peyton Randolph returns."

"I passed him on the way. He had Mr. Braxton with him. I suppose you know Mr. Jefferson has been appointed in Randolph's place, and John Hancock is president of the Congress." He rested his arms on his legs, lacing his long fingers between his knees.

"Yes, I know. I had hoped that Mr. Braxton would be appointed in place of Randolph."

"Surely not Braxton!" He glanced up sharply. There was not the faintest trace of the emotion that had disturbed Evelyn in his questioning look.

"I do, indeed. We have need of conservative thought."

"He is no better than a Tory."

"It is uninformed to say that, Francis. Mr. Braxton proposed the Continental Congress, and he will go as far as the good of the colonies requires."

Francis smiled. "We'll never agree on that, Evelyn. But it doesn't matter. Mr. Jefferson is there." There was a hard silence between them before he went on: "I came to ask you if you would ride into the country with me after dinner. I don't think I can stand Mrs. Cooper's chattering. Evelyn, how do you bear it, day after day?"

She laughed at thought of Emeline's hysterical jabbering to one with ear as unsympathetic as Foutré's. "She is kind, and a very old friend, and she throws a cloak of innocence about my presence here. Her indifference to affairs is a source of amusement to everyone who knows her. The King himself could act as Governor and she would never know it."

"That is reason enough," he agreed. He did not repeat his request

for her to ride with him. What he had planned to say had already met with the reception he had feared. It would be wiser for him to start for Norfolk now, and not submit a second time to the irresistible excitement of her company.

But she had not ignored his question. "I will go with you," she said, "if you think the roads are safely dry. We had a dreadful storm last week. It hailed stones as big as your fist."

"The roads are safe enough," he smiled. "It's only my heart you have to fear."

"Your heart and mine," she replied, and rising, took his arm and walked with him back to the house.

7

PEYTON RANDOLPH returned to Williamsburg on a tide of glory. A detachment of cavalry from the Williamsburg Volunteers, resplendent in new uniforms, set out in regular military procession to greet him. Carter Braxton met him at Ruffin's Ferry and the procession turned back to Williamsburg, passing along Duke of Gloucester Street, to the ringing of bells and the cheers of the people who lined the streets. Sitting back in his coach out of view, Randolph was contemplating the genuine enthusiasm of the reception and was happy for both Braxton and himself. For years they had taken the same conservative position on conciliation and trade and the payment of British debts. This stirring reception seemed to prove that the colonists themselves favored the sober course.

The coach drew up before Randolph's broad white frame house opposite the powder magazine. As the two men stepped out, the cheers of the people rang out afresh. In the forefront of the group which had gathered before Randolph's house to welcome him, stood Robert Carter Nicholas, and at the back, lawyer George Wythe's keen blue eyes and sharp nose were as conspicuous as a beacon on a dark night.

Separated from Randolph by the crowd, Braxton stood on the walk watching the people slowly disperse, when Sheldon touched his arm.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked, and it seemed to Braxton that there was embarrassment in his manner.

"Sheldon! How does it happen that you are in Williamsburg?"

"I will have to explain that at some length, sir." A knowing smile crossed Braxton's face.

"Come in and speak to Mr. Randolph. He was a friend and admirer of your father, and I think he would appreciate it. Then perhaps we can take a short walk and you can tell me what you have to say."

Gradually the guests began to thin out until only Randolph, Wythe, Braxton and Sheldon were left in the sunlit parlor. Randolph sat by the window and stretched out his crossed legs. He looked desperately tired and his great bulk seemed to sag.

"Don't you think it would be wiser if we came back to see you later in the day, Peyton?" Braxton suggested.

Randolph raised a protesting hand. "No, I pray you stay. There are one or two things that I would like to discuss with you gentlemen." His eyes strayed to the window and he spoke as if he were reflecting aloud. "Now that Concord and Lexington have proven to the Ministry that we mean to fight, they might hold out the olive branch. I do not like to see the possibility of peace jeopardized by the activities of the Sons of Liberty or by rash acts like Henry's in calling up the Hanover Volunteers. They typify the sort of impetuous reasoning we should like to avoid. It is dangerously provocative while the colonies are at fever heat," Randolph went on.

"Our troubles with the Sons of Liberty are just beginning," Wythe remarked gravely.

"Exactly." Randolph brought his fist down hard on the arm of his chair. "And it savors too strongly of mob rule for my liking. Until now, the Sons of Liberty have been far less active in Williamsburg than in other parts of the Colony. But I hear that we have been frequently favored of late by one Francis Foutré, who might be styled a mere courier of the organization did he not exercise such influence."

Sheldon leaned forward, his anger giving way to interest. Did Randolph know what he was talking about?

"Of course the Sons of Liberty try the suspects, but in many cases they have been over-hasty with the tar brush. I think it would be advisable to discourage them here. But first we must ascertain the identity of Foutré's agent. That he has one, I've no doubt, for this year is the first that he has paid us the compliment of his attention."

"Feeling runs so high against the Tories in Norfolk, that the patriots are behind the Sons of Liberty almost to a man," Braxton reminded him. "Of course, defiance of the Association is a breach of our own law, and the Sons of Liberty will claim they are merely upholding the law in cases where we fail to act."

"We are not organized to act as swiftly as they, and if we were, our course would, I hope, be less impulsive than theirs. I admit, we cannot attack the Sons of Liberty without patriotic disapproval. However, we might discreetly curb their activities in this town." Randolph sighed deeply, and shifted his chair out of a shaft of sunlight that was moving slowly across his face. "I repeat, sirs, we must first discover Foutré's agent." He put the tips of his fingers together. "I advise discretion because much of the information which the Sons of Liberty have gathered has proved to be of greatest value to us. None of us can fail to be grateful that provisions intended for the British in Boston found their way to the cold and hungry patriots in the besieged city. My only objection to the Sons of Liberty is that they should give England just grounds for indignation before conciliation has become finally hopeless."

As he finished speaking, Randolph appeared so tired and distraught that his guests rose almost simultaneously. George Wythe said, with obvious concern, "You mustn't sicken yourself with worry, sir. The Sons of Liberty are a natural outgrowth of the people's alarm."

Randolph lifted himself from his chair with an effort. "Perhaps you are right," he admitted. "There is so slight a chance for conciliation, now, it's difficult to feel that added provocation on either side matters."

Sheldon was tempted to confess his acquaintanceship with Foutré, but something deterred him from mentioning it: a sudden suspicion of Evelyn's association with the courier, and a sneaking sympathy for the Sons of Liberty.

Braxton, Wythe and Sheldon came out of Randolph's house together and turned down the street toward the Raleigh Tavern.

"I feel the need of something strong and cheering, George. Will you join us in a drink?"

"Thank you, but I have business of pressing importance awaiting me at my office," Wythe explained. "Perhaps I shall see you at the reception in Mr. Randolph's honor tonight." Wythe bade his com-

panions good evening and went on to his office.

Braxton and Sheldon crossed the street and went into the Raleigh Tavern.

"Are you lodging here?" Braxton asked as he and Sheldon went on. "You haven't yet told me why you are in Williamsburg, or is it presumptuous to inquire?"

"Not at all, sir!" Sheldon began to search carefully for words that would best express his purpose in coming here. "You can understand my embarrassment over the affair at Doncastle's." The subject still brought a flush to his face. "The plan outlined at New Castle appeared to me to be a direct attack upon Lord Dunmore and I was for it with all my heart. It was not easy to see my friends subsequently sought out as Colonel Corbin was and abused as you were." He paused as they entered the tap-room; they took a table and ordered Holland and bitters. Then he went on: "I thought that if I came down here, talked to people—anyone—found out how they felt, it would clarify my own position." He had kept his eyes steadily on Braxton's, studying the effect of his words on his listener. As he finished speaking, a figure entered the tap-room, a figure he recognized out of the corner of his eye. Hurriedly he rested his face against his open hand and hoped that Francis Foutré would not notice him. When Foutré turned and walked out of the room, Sheldon gave a little sigh of relief. Just why he felt so apprehensive at the thought of a meeting between Braxton and Foutré, he could not say, but he felt that of the two men who had heard Randolph's indictment of the Sons of Liberty, Braxton's condemnation of the organization would be the most uncompromising and that when he next saw Foutré, it should be alone.

When they had finished their drinks, Braxton rose abruptly. "I will meet you in the hall in a moment. I want a word with Southall."

Sheldon walked to the street with him. Scully was there, astride Braxton's old bay and leading Pepper. When Braxton was in the saddle, he bent a quizzical smile on Sheldon. "Francis Foutré is in the parlor. Mind you do not question him too far." And he kicked Pepper into a trot down Duke of Gloucester Street.

Sheldon stood speechless, staring after Braxton. He was at a loss to know why his friend had thought it necessary to identify Foutré or why had he said "Mind you do not question him too far?" What

could questioning reveal that he should be warned against it? His brain was whirling in a confusion of speculation when he went back into the tavern, determined at least to solve the mystery before the day was much older.

Foutré sat alone in a corner of the parlor, but the presence of two other men loudly discussing the details of a whirlwind that had swept eight plantations in King and Queen the previous week, stopped him on the threshold. At sight of Sheldon, Foutré rose and came to join him in the hall.

"You look distraught," he said with a sly smile.

"I should like to talk to you," Sheldon replied shortly. "Will you do me the honor to come to my room, so that I can speak in private?"

"With pleasure." Foutré bowed, a twinkle brightening his dark eyes.

They climbed the stairs in silence. Not until they were behind the closed door of his room did Sheldon speak again. "I came here from Mr. Randolph's house with Colonel Braxton. They were discussing you there, and I was sure, from the nature of his comments, that Colonel Braxton did not know you by sight. Yet when he left just now, he told me that you were in the parlor. Can you tell me how he knew that?"

"I can surmise that he marked your attempt to avoid me." Foutré grinned. "You did it rather clumsily. And while you hid your face, Colonel Braxton had a good look at me. I dare say he asked Southall who I was. My presence here is no secret. Had it been, I should not have chosen to lodge at the Raleigh Tavern."

"I know you are a courier of the Sons of Liberty," Sheldon admitted.

An amused smile stole across Foutré's face. Presently he nodded.

"What Mr. Randolph said," Sheldon told him, "made me curious to know the real purpose in Williamsburg of the Sons of Liberty."

"Their only desire here is to defend the rights of the Colony. And, so far, they have been effective."

"Do you work from a system of espionage?"

"I should hardly say that," Foutré answered deliberately. "Our eyes and ears are alert. There are many of us and we hear a great deal. We act accordingly. Before we are through there won't be a Tory willing to break the Association. Not unless he wants to swap broadcloth for a coat of tar." For a moment after he had spoken, he

studied Sheldon with speculative eyes. Then he asked, "What are your sentiments?"

"I am a Hanover Volunteer, of the militia that marched under Henry. That ought to answer your question. But I am opposed to mob rule, Mr. Foutré."

Foutré snorted. "Do you not think the Sons of Liberty are organized in a manner to prevent that? Since 1766, they have fought the oppressive acts of Parliament. Do you approve of the Stamp Act and the Tory merchants who are shipping food and provisions to an army that is besieging Boston and murdering our farmers in Lexington and Concord because they dared to defend their rights?"

"No, but I do object to acts of vandalism against people who are given no chance to vindicate themselves. Fair trial, sir, is still the core of justice. Look what they did to Governor Hutchinson in Boston—sacked his house, threw his plate into the street and destroyed his library in their fury over the Stamp Act; yet it was proved conclusively that Hutchinson did his best to prevent passage of the Act."

Foutré spread his hands, and his black eyebrows went up. "In any cause, the innocent are apt to suffer with the guilty. But on the whole, the Sons of Liberty have been justified. Tomorrow I go to Norfolk where they've forced the merchant, Henning, to close down because he openly fought the Association. He's been importing from England right along, and because nobody would buy from him down there, he loaded one of his ships with supplies and sent it up to Boston. I can tell you not a mouthful of food nor a yard of cloth reached its destination." In Foutré's eyes shone a gleam of sarcasm. "Do you disapprove of that?"

"No patriot would," Sheldon declared. "But Randolph and Braxton and Wythe feel that punishment of the Loyalists should be left to the Assembly and the militia."

"To the devil with them!" Foutré cried. "They are a pack of old women when it comes to acting. In the meantime, Massachusetts needs help and she's going to get it!"

There was a short, pregnant silence which Sheldon broke with the question he had been wanting to ask. "You have only recently turned your attention to Williamsburg. Why is that?"

Foutré deliberated his answer, then gave it with more than a hint of caution. "The college is a hotbed of patriotic fervor suppressed

to as great an extent as possible by the Tory faculty. The removal of James Innis as usher because he accepted a captaincy in the militia showed mighty clearly the strength of Tory defiance in Williamsburg. We felt it was time our attention was turned more particularly in this direction."

Sheldon hazarded another question. "Do you find patriots willing to act as your agents?"

"We find them willing and discreet"—Foutré smiled—"and generally voluntary. There are many like yourself—strong men whose bellies were turned by Pitcairn and his murdering lobster-backs."

"It would do more good," Sheldon cried suddenly, "if the Sons of Liberty were to hound Lord Dunmore out of Virginia. He's the source of our troubles here, you can mark that!"

"Dunmore's time is coming," Foutré predicted, and rose stiffly from his chair. Stretching his legs out to release muscles still strained by arduous riding, he grunted deeply.

"You have postponed by a day your trip to Norfolk, I see," Sheldon observed.

Foutré's gaunt face flushed surprisingly as he thrust his soft felt hat under his arm. "Yes. I would postpone it indefinitely to remain here if I could." His voice was low and full with an emotion Sheldon was certain could be inspired by only one thing. That Foutré found this inspiration in Williamsburg took a weight off his heart; a weight that had been suppressing it with all the fury of unreasoning suspicion since that day at St. John's. He wanted to sing with joy and gratitude; to go to Evelyn and tell her what an injustice he had done her. Make her say over and over again that she loved him and would marry him before misunderstanding again drove its damnable wedge between them. Instead he asked with forced casualness, "Will you be present at the reception in Mr. Randolph's honor, tonight?"

"I hadn't thought of it, but I will," Foutré replied. "Then I must certainly go to Norfolk or they'll say I am growing soft and sentimental. Shall we drink a quiet toast—you and I—to the Sons of Liberty at Mr. Randolph's reception?"

Sheldon nodded. "To the Sons of Liberty and your happiness, sir."

All along Duke of Gloucester Street that evening candles shone in the windows, and street lamps glowed and sputtered with a friendly

warmth. By the time Peyton Randolph's carriage drew up before the Raleigh Tavern, everyone was in high spirits, and parlor, taproom and reception room were crowded to capacity. When Randolph entered the hall, Braxton, who had arrived with the Burwells shortly before, led him into the parlor where Robert Carter Nicholas, George Wythe and John Page were in deep conversation with Thomas Jefferson. The tall, red-haired lawyer from Albemarle was making a point. "I asked that my window sashes be subject to the condemnation of the Continental Association and I am sure I need them as badly as Potter needs his harness. Ah!" He looked up and his face brightened. "Here is Mr. Randolph."

Sheldon withdrew to the taproom door while the Burgesses greeted the honored guest and it was there he stood when Foutré entered the tavern with Evelyn. At first, her presence shocked him so that he could only stand and stare at her. Then hot, surging anger took hold of him. He might have known that Evelyn's long silence meant this, and that once caught by her charm, as Foutré had so obviously been in Richmond, he would pursue her wherever she led. But how did it happen that she was in Williamsburg? He had been in and out of the town for days without seeing her!

Coming into the reception room adjoining the taproom, Evelyn had turned to speak to a group of ladies when Foutré saw Sheldon. Raising his hand above his head in greeting, he touched Evelyn's arm and said something to her which caused her to look up. Sheldon had not returned Foutré's greeting, and when Evelyn saw his ashen face she stopped dead. A moment before she had been smiling gaily with the excitement of the evening. Now her face, too, had gone white and she stared at Sheldon incredulously. The effort it required for her to compose herself was clearly visible as Foutré led her across the crowded parlor. Foutré's dark, sensitive face was flushed with pleasure, and his large hand, enfolding hers, was gently possessive.

"This is my friend, Mr. Hilliard, Evelyn."

"I know Mr. Hilliard," she said in a voice that would have trembled had she relaxed her rigid self-control for one instant.

Sheldon's eyes, level and cold, held hers briefly, and then he bowed.

"You know each other?" Foutré asked, and then, getting no response, he realized that something was wrong. He thought, either I have introduced arch-enemies or—he swept the thought aside. But

it kept recurring to him, as he forced conversation on them; he spoke of the gathering, the illuminations, of how soon the English finery—velvets, silks and Irish laces—would disappear from the wardrobes of the ladies and gentlemen of Virginia.

Sheldon and Evelyn responded to his garrulous efforts in monosyllables. Suddenly the voice of Robert Nicholas, from the reception room, rose above the general talk.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to propose a toast." Glasses were quickly filled and presented to those who had none—deep ruby port that took fire in the candlelight.

"His Majesty the King!"

The company raised their glasses to their lips, repeating the toast with noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

"His Excellency the Governor!"

An almost inaudible mumbling ran through the gathering before this toast was drunk.

Foutré smiled before touching his glass to his lips.

"Mr. Randolph!" Nicholas' voice rang out, now, with an assurance that this toast would draw a willing response.

"Mr. Randolph!" Cheers echoed through the tavern.

Foutré turned to Sheldon, his glass empty but for a single sip. "Mr. Hilliard, I give you the Sons of Liberty!" His eyes, beneath raised brows, burned with the challenge.

Sheldon's met it with a deadly level gaze. "The Sons of Liberty!"

A tentative smile crept into Foutré's face. "You do not drink to my happiness, sir."

Without removing his eyes from Foutré's, Sheldon set down his glass on a small table at his side. "There are others who could do that with more sincerity than I," he replied. At his clipped, icy response, Foutré started forward, but Evelyn put a restraining hand on his arm. Conversation around them had stopped as the two men became the center of attention.

Drawing himself to his full height, Sheldon shifted his eyes to Evelyn and saw that her cheeks were aflame and her eyes flashing. How did she dare be angry when she had allowed Foutré to flaunt her in his face, to stand there before him with her hand in his. If that was the way she wanted it to be, she could have it, but he would not stay to see it.

With forced composure, he bowed extravagantly to them both and pushed his way through the crowd to the hall. Summoning a servant, he ordered his saddle-bags and his horse, then hurried through the Apollo Room to the stable yard.

8

ON THE night of June third, 1775, Beverly Dickson led a band of fellow students from William and Mary College through the covering shadows of the streets to the octagonal powder magazine. If Captain Stretch could steal powder for the Governor, they would just as cleverly remove the long-barrelled muskets, and arm themselves and any other patriots who had a mind to defend themselves. They crept into the building and cautiously approached the long row of guns whose polished stocks and flint-locks shone in a broken shaft of moonlight which pierced the east window.

Scarcely had they come within reach of the muskets when a deafening report echoed against the brick walls and rumbled back from the conical roof. When the acrid smoke had cleared and the stunned little band could collect their wits, they saw that Beverly Dickson and two others of their companions lay groaning on the floor. Anger and fright paralyzed them for a moment. They looked at one another with a single thought—escape before the Palace guard ended all hope of ever fighting back. Quickly they carried their wounded friends from the magazine, across the market square and took refuge in the Tavern.

Before morning the news had leaked out to every patriot in Williamsburg. By the Governor's order, a cord communicating with two spring guns had been placed so that the arms could not be approached without serious injury to the intruders. It was all right, they cried, for the Governor to steal their powder, but the people couldn't arm themselves from their own arsenal!

That wasn't the end of it. A committee, appointed by the House of Burgesses, examined the magazine and discovered that several barrels of powder had been secreted under the floor with the obvious intention of blowing up the building when Dunmore thought the Williamsburgers' antagonism had come to a head.

For the first time, the people realized that the war had begun in earnest and it was hopeless to think of conciliation. They began to walk the streets warily. Their houses bristled with ominous activity as rifles and pistols were cleaned and sabers polished. In the taverns the talk was all of vengeance and violence. James Innis threw a guard around the powder magazine. Now, be damned to the Governor and all his guns and soldiers! They were ready, with justice on their side.

Down from the North galloped an express, dust-covered and wild eyed. The British generals, Howe, Clinton and Burgoyne, had arrived in Boston with enough troops to swell the regular ranks to ten thousand men. Even while England sent out the "olive branch" tied to Lord North's deceptive proposals, she was preparing for war, reinforcing her manpower to lay siege to Boston.

Then came the rumor that Captain Collins of the *Magdalene* was sailing up the James with a hundred marines to teach the Williamsburgers a lesson, and the news from the North that Samuel Adams and John Hancock had been proscribed put spark to the fuse.

Lord Dunmore paced his room like a caged animal. Now and then he would glance into his wife's sitting room. She sat very still, surrounded by their frightened, whimpering children. At two o'clock in the morning he made the only decision which gave him any confidence that he and his family wouldn't be torn to pieces by a mob of angry patriots. He bundled Lady Dunmore and the children into the coach, mounted his horse, and with Captain Foy and a retinue of servants, set out on the road to Yorktown as fast as the horses could gallop. Not until they were all aboard the *Fowey*, with guns trained on the wharf, did he draw an easy breath. Let the Williamsburgers come and get him if they could.

What would the Ministry say to the King's representative who had so precipitately fled because a pack of angry Colonials had scared the wits out of him? He thought uneasily of the message he had left for the House of Burgesses, complaining that he apprehended personal danger, but declaring his willingness to cooperate with the Assembly in the public affairs. He should have put his indignation in stronger terms. No representative of the King had a right to compromise. He must send another, more determined complaint.

And then came a message that put his mind at rest. A deputation from the Assembly urged him to return to the Palace. His own and

his family's safety would be guaranteed. Captain Foy was summoned to help him compose his answer: The spirit of the Burgesses toward him was unfriendly; His Majesty's magazine had been rifled; the King's troops had been attacked and His Majesty's loyal subjects persecuted. He would return only if Lord North's "olive branch" was accepted. If the Colonies would make due appropriations for their part of the expenses of the kingdom, then it would be expedient that Great Britain should cease to tax them!

The Burgesses discarded their powdered wigs and ruffles for the long-fringed hunting shirts, stood their rifles ready to hand, and delegated Thomas Jefferson to compose the Assembly's reply. The Colonies had the right to give their money as they pleased. Their country was invaded and the King had made no effort to redress that or any other wrong. They had learned to expect nothing from England, and were left to commit their cause to a higher justice. In order to live under the principles that the English themselves demanded, the Virginians who had been faithful subjects under faithful rule were driven to a strange course.

Whatever happened, royal government of the Old Dominion was at an end.

Twenty-five miles stood between Sheldon and Will and the rectangular log house on the North River which had come to Will with the title to his father's grant; twenty-five miles of hard riding since the July afternoon that ended the first day of their eastward journey. Will's Augusta forests had kindled a spark of resolution in Sheldon that had been as remote to him as hope of happiness when he had left Williamsburg in May after his meeting with Evelyn at the Raleigh Tavern, and had gone west to seek his friend. He had seen a tract of land near Will's that could be cleared before winter, and he had chosen the site for his house. Before it would stretch the fertile valley, and beyond, winding through rich bottom-land, the Middle River. The red earth yielded finer crops than those of the Tidewater, and over the land the shadow of royal misrule was fainter than in the East. Colonel Braxton could help him secure title to a small grant for his part in Dunmore's War, just as Will's father had secured his grant of three hundred acres for his long service in Braddock's War. He would sell Shipley, take just those possessions he

could pile into a wagon and come back to Augusta in the autumn.

Over ham and ale and stale biscuits at Steele's Tavern he and Will were making plans when they heard of Governor Dunmore's flight. A young trader named Joseph Scott, who recognized Will, sat down at the table and gave them the news. Astonished that he was the first to tell them, he asked incredulously, "Where happens you've bin hidin'?"

Will laughed. "I wouldn't have hid from news like that. We've been huntin', me an' my friend, here. Haven't seen a soul these four weeks. Will you tell us more?"

"There's not much more to tell. A Committee of Safety tends to everything—callin' up the militia, tellin' the other colonies what's happenin' in Virginia and the like. I reckon there's an express gone all the way to Fincastle by now. I heerd tell an officer went out with the express to enlist riflemen to form a company of fifty. So many of 'em wanted to join he drew a nose on a board an' told 'em the first fifty to hit the mark he'd take. Guess that'll show 'em what we think o' their regulars."

Will's eyes began to dance. "Reckon that means fightin' at last!"

"Yeh. You joinin'?"

"I already joined," Will informed him. "This was as far as I was goin', but you've changed my mind, Scott. Reckon I'll be goin' on to Hanover with Mr. Hilliard now."

"Colonel Washington's been made Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army," Scott said.

"Continental Army?" Will echoed.

"That's what they call it."

"What about Patrick Henry?" Sheldon questioned.

"I couldn't rightly say. I've told you all I know."

"Will you have a drink?" Sheldon offered.

"Thank you, no. Hit's time I was goin'. You from the Tidewater?"

Sheldon nodded.

"He was goin' out to sell his plantation on the James," Will explained, "an' then he was comin' back to the Valley, but I reckon he'll keep it a while longer if there's to be war."

"That's right," Sheldon affirmed. "If there's fighting I'm going to stay around there."

The young trader took off his bucktail cap and scratched his head.

His face screwed up in a frown. "Iffen there's war, there'll be fightin' with the Injuns a-plenty. I hear tell Lord Dunmore's agent, Conolly's bin stirrin' 'em up in favor of the British, promisin' all kinds o' reward."

"It's not the first time." Sheldon scowled.

9

THE heat of late July lay like a blanket over the Tidewater when Sheldon and Will rode up to Smith's Tavern in Hanover.

"Who the devil's going to take these saddle-bags?" Sheldon roared. "Fine service you get at this place. Are they all dead over there?"

His voice drew a quick response from a familiar-looking lanky figure.

"Lacey! Come over here, you black rascal! What are you doing in Hanover?" Sheldon brushed a fly off the end of his nose and gave the slave a wry grin. "Has Aunt Florrie been kickin' up trouble?"

The look of joy that had spread over Lacey's face dissolved into a mask of gloom.

"Mars Sheldon, I bin all the way to Williamsburg lookin' fer ya. Colonel Braxton, he tole me he di'n know where yo'all was, so I come back heah yestiddy. Miss Florrie, she's goin' away. She done say de rebels 're after her and she's gonna leave Virginny."

Sheldon looked at Will, whose disgust with Aunt Florrie was written in a deep scowl. Then he chuckled and patted Lacey's arm.

"That sounds just like her. She's only talking, Lacey."

"No, suh, she ain't. Us niggers 'as bin packin' her belongin's fer days. She's goin' on a boat to England, she say'd. Soldiers come to Bellevue an' she come out ob de house an' tole 'em to git away. Dey di'n pay her no mind. Jes goes on an' says deys lookin' fer Collin."

Sheldon's smile froze on his face. Aunt Florrie going to England? Nothing she had ever said to him, no quarrel they had ever had, could blind him to the significance of her leaving. She was the last of his family, and she would go, driven from Virginia by men who had done no more, very likely, than he had done with the detachment at Laneville. She would think of him as one of them, until it might have

been he who had ridden into Bellevue.

"Lacey, I'm going to see Miss Florrie. Perhaps I can persuade her not to go." His voice was dull with despair. If Aunt Florrie had made up her mind, the Lord himself couldn't change it.

"You want fer me to go wif you, Mars Sheldon?"

"Of course I do. What horse have you got?"

"I took Princess, Mars Sheldon."

"All right. You take Nero and follow slowly. Slowly, do you mind? He's been a long way. I'll ride Princess."

Will stood, hands on hips, listening to their conversation and wagging his head. "Yer wastin' time," he commented sourly.

"Waste or not, Will, I've got to do it. I can't let her go without even trying to stop her."

A company of militia in shirt sleeves, sweat shining on the muscular ridges of their bare arms, marched across the court house green to the field behind the building. Some carried muskets, some rifles, and there were two or three blunderbusses, squat and absurd in comparison with the long-barrelled rifles.

Will let out a whoop when he recognized a tight-jowled face. "That's our company, Sheldon. Hanged if it ain't. I'm goin' to find Sam Meredith."

"I'll join you as soon as I can," Sheldon told him. A half-grin tugged at a corner of his mouth. "Maybe tonight."

Lacey's report was true. Packing barrels stood in the great hall of Bellevue, and row upon row of polished silver lay on a damask cloth on the dining-room table. Sheldon bounded up the stairs to Miss Florrie's room and beat on the door.

It was flung open by Miss Florrie herself. "Don't ever pound on my door like that!" she cried. Then, as she recognized Sheldon, a scarlet flush mounted her cheeks. His presence seemed to render her incapable of speech. Wiping her hands on a wisp of white lawn, she motioned him into her room.

He, too, found it difficult to talk. He had thought of so many things to say while on the way to Fredericksburg. Things that he could say with tender earnestness, because the flood of despondency that had swept over him at the thought of her going, surprised even himself. It started a parade of memories that made his eyes sting: the gentle-

ness of her care when she nursed him after Dunmore's War; the loneliness she protested against when he went to college. How little he really thought of it then, in his boy's selfishness! She *must* have been lonely here, and probably frightened half the time when she pretended to be so fearless and self-reliant.

He could have told her easily what was in his heart, that she was deep in his affections despite all their differences, had she not sat before him with livid accusation in her face.

"What made you come here?" she finally asked. "To see for yourself what your military scoundrels have driven me to?"

His throat felt lined with sand, and his words had a thin, depthless sound. "I came to see why you were going away."

"Who told you I was!" she demanded.

"Lacey. He met me in Hanover."

"What does he mean by leaving the stable without my permission? Well, it's your affair if your slaves won't obey orders. I'm selling every last one of mine except Cora. She's going with me."

Cora, packing quietly in a corner of the room, began to snivel.

"Stop that sniveling this minute!" Miss Florrie cried. "You ought to be grateful, you black wench, that I'm taking you out of this land of iniquity. Had I never lived to see the day Bellevue would be over-run by a pack of insolent, filthy clod-hoppers!"

"Why did they come here?" Sheldon asked.

"Why? You ask that? You certainly ought to know! Most likely to drive me from Bellevue so they can take the place themselves."

"Did they give you no reason for coming?" Sheldon pursued desperately.

"They gave me a reason, all right, after they had dragged Collin off with them. And do you think Cappy or Cymon would lift a finger to stop them? Not on their lives! They both hid in the kitchen."

"They couldn't have done anything, Aunt Florrie."

"Well, I did. I shot one of them in the arm, and if I weren't half blind I would have hit him where I aimed!"

"What did you shoot him with?"

"The dueling pistol your father gave me for just such a purpose. I defied him to come back, but you can be sure he didn't!"

Sheldon mopped his brow. The heat of the room and the thought of what might have happened to Aunt Florrie were too much for

him. He could feel cold sweat trickling down between his shoulder blades.

"You haven't told me what they said," he persisted.

"They gave me some prattle about Collin accepting goods from Captain Robertson for Bellevue, and that he violated the Association. I suppose they were taking the poor man off to prison."

"Aunt Florrie, I told you Collin was a scoundrel!" Sheldon cried, understanding at last why the troops had come to Bellevue. "The Articles of Association are the laws of the Colonies. I reminded Collin of that fact when I was here last winter. If he chose to violate them, he got what he deserved. He is an even greater scoundrel than I thought for exposing you to criticism and attack. With your permission, I will go before the Committee for you."

"You will do nothing of the kind. Cora, find me the *Gazette*!"

Cora slipped eagerly out of the room, as Miss Florrie's voice rose to an unrestrained pitch.

"I'll show you how right they were. If they are not already eating humble pie, I should find great pleasure in seeing it stuffed down their throats. No, Sheldon, nothing you can say will persuade me to stay in this country a minute longer than necessary. Even Mr. Henry has gone mad with a little power, and as for Colonel Braxton, he is quite out of his mind. Do you believe the colonists seriously think they are a match for the King's troops?"

"They are more of a match than you imagine, Aunt Florrie, but that is beside the point."

"It is not beside the point. The colonies will find the King's hand heavy in displeasure, and I would like to stay to see their punishment. But I will not remain a citizen of Virginia so long as she defies the Crown."

"Have you heard of Breed's Hill, Aunt Florrie?"

"Your raw-boned militia was defeated!"

"But at what a cost! And remember, if they'd had sufficient ammunition, slaughter of the British would have been even greater, and the Americans would certainly have held their ground."

"If! If! But they didn't have it, did they? And they are being starved into submission."

Sheldon shook his head wearily. "I didn't come to argue, Aunt Florrie. But it's only fair that you should understand what is hap-

pening. Beyond the Blue Ridge there is a vast land, a very rich land, and some day it will surely be as thickly settled as the east coast. I have just come back from Augusta, where a man cannot understand why the land that he has cleared and planted and made his home by grant, should suddenly be snatched away from him because Lord Dunmore has repudiated the grant and given it to a friend." Finding her gaze attentive, he hurried on hopefully. "To the settler, there is no justice in that, and he is right. It's no better this side of the Blue Ridge. We're denied the same principles of fair government that the English demand, but we're called rebels because we protest. When men like Colonel Braxton, who have so much to lose by war and so little to gain, can't swallow the oppressions of English rule, you must admit there is justice on our side. To you the patriots are traitors. To the patriots, Collin and his kind are traitors, and as long as war has come you cannot blame the colonies for stamping out treachery."

Miss Florrie's face had gone pale and when she answered Sheldon it was in a voice vibrant with outrage. "I am thankful your father is not alive to hear you speak so!" From the trembling hands of Cora she snatched the *Gazette*. "Listen to this! It's signed by Robert Brown. 'I repeatedly heard John Parsons, shipbuilder in Gloucester'—he is one of Captain Robertson's accusers, and indirectly the accuser of Collin—'say that he saw upwards of one thousand pounds' worth of goods landed and put into one of Messrs. James Mills and Company's warehouses; likewise, that said goods came from on board the ship *London*, Captain Moses Robertson. A few days afterwards, the Rev. Samuel Klug summoned the said John Parsons to appear before the Committee of this County; but he absolutely refused to attend, swearing he never saw one farthing's worth of goods landed; he also said if it would be satisfactory to the Committee, he would willingly go before any magistrate, and make oath that he was not the propagator of such a report—To the above I am ready to make oath whenever required.' That will show you how much faith can be put in the word of a rebel!"

Sheldon smiled wryly at her, and reaching forward, took her hand between his. "That proves, Aunt Florrie, that the Committee is as interested in justice as the accused."

Pulling her hand free, she rose and began to pace back and forth

across the faded Aubusson carpet. Suddenly she stopped before him, her hands folded at her breast so tightly the knuckles stood out like white knobs. "Sheldon Hilliard, I am going to England. That's settled. And I will be glad if you leave me, now. You make me monstrously unhappy sitting here talking like a rag-tail revolutionary. I have tried to make allowance for your youthfulness, but I find that is wrong, for you can fire a musket as easily as the next man, and your fire is directed against the King."

"You misjudge my sentiments. My fire is not directed against the King but against the Governor."

"The rebels have driven Lord Dunmore away, so your fight should be ended," Miss Florrie retorted.

"I fear we will not be rid of him so easily," Sheldon remarked half to himself.

"It would lessen my respect for him if you were," she replied, turning her back on him as she moved to the window. For a moment she stood still, then drawing aside the heavy figured linen draperies, she looked out across the river.

Sheldon's eyes slid to Cora's nimble fingers, turning fold upon fold of her mistress's dresses into a large cedar-lined chest, laying strips of white linen between them. He rose and walked to the foot of the bed. In a neat pile on the pillow lay dozens of white handkerchiefs with dainty edgings of lace, and fine thread stockings with cobwebby clocks. Above this pile, half-hidden, protruded a frame of diamonds. Curiosity sent Sheldon around the bed, though he knew Cora's eyes were following him. When he glanced up at her, she picked up a bundle of nightshifts and slipped noiselessly from the room. Lifting the stockings, he saw two miniatures in oval frames, one encircled by tiny diamonds, the other by narrow, beaded rosewood. The miniature in the diamond frame was of himself as a boy of five. He recognized the sober face and large, questioning eyes, and the shoulders of the rose velvet jacket his mother had brought him from Paris. The other face he did not know. It was a rather long, aesthetic face, with serious gray eyes, and a half-humorous set of the mouth. A decidedly handsome face beneath the high-brushed sweep of black hair. He wondered, as he laid the stockings back in place, if this was the face of Michael Forrest. Turning from the bed, he saw that Miss Florrie was watching him. She looked suddenly

fragile and pathetic. He made a tentative movement toward her, waiting for her expression to harden and bring him to a halt, but there was no change in the tired and bewildered look in her dark eyes. She turned again to the river.

It seemed an eternity before she spoke. Then she said, in a weary and curiously restrained voice, "When Michael Forrest was lost at sea, my whole world seemed to fall apart. I had no desire to build a new one. I came to Bellevue to live, trying to recapture something of that lost world. This was the place where we were to have lived together. I could see him in the house and riding over the land. I felt his presence whenever I looked at the river—he loved the water. It never occurred to me, when I tried to escape from people and familiar things, that I knew nothing about managing a plantation. It was utterly bewildering to me.

"The Pages soon saw how helpless I was. They found me an over-seer. In the spring Collin came to Bellevue. He was—I know it's hard to believe now—a curiously attractive man, not much older than I. He took complete charge of the plantation. It was a wonderful relief. Everything seemed to run so smoothly." She spoke almost as if to herself. "But I was lonely. As the months went by and I was able to think of the future, my loneliness became an intolerable burden. I invented reasons for seeing Collin—the crops, the slaves—anything that would give me an excuse to talk to someone besides the house servants. Suddenly I realized I had grown to depend on our meetings. I think he sensed it—"

Sheldon felt the clamminess of his folded hands creep up his arms. A wave of weakness ended in the pit of his stomach. Aunt Florrie couldn't mean what she seemed to be so calmly implying. She went on in the same reflective voice, still standing motionless before the window.

"When the day's work kept him too busy to see me, he would come in the evening. Soon he made a habit of coming then and we would talk of everything. He seemed to understand my loneliness—" For the first time, she turned from the window to Sheldon's ashen face. The only indication of the emotional turmoil her reminiscences awakened lay in her tightly clasped hands. She moved toward him until she was looking up into his face. "I don't know what happened," she told him quietly, holding his eyes to her own. "Quite suddenly

I realized that he loved me, and I—I suppose I was grateful for it. At first, nothing else mattered—”

Understanding of many things that had long puzzled him began to seep through Sheldon's incredulity. Aunt Florrie had lived all these years with the memory of Michael Forrest and the reality of Collin's hold on her. In the loneliness of which she had complained so often, trying to keep him beside her, she had turned to a man unfit to live on the same land with her.

Sheldon felt a mounting surge of self-reproach. If he had lived at Bellevue, perhaps he would have heard all of this much sooner. He would have driven Collin from the plantation as he had so often wanted to do. And there would have been no protesting talk of his way with the slaves. He would have stood between Aunt Florrie and the overseer as his father would have done, giving Collin a taste of the lash he would never forget, should he ever seek to hold his place by threats.

But it was too late now and he had helped to drive her from Virginia. He could scarcely face her gaze, half questioning, half distant, as if the things she had said had swept her back to a futile past on a flood tide of memories. In one stride he had her in his arms, pressing her head gently against his chest, and enfolding her in one strong arm as desperately as if she were his last possession. Feeling his arm trembling, she lifted her head and took his face between her hands. His skin felt taut and hot to her touch, and when he put his lips to her forehead, they were dry.

“You mustn't go,” he whispered hoarsely because a miserable tightness in his throat would not let the words come easily. “I understand so much, Aunt Florrie. Don't make me feel I have helped to drive you away from here.”

“It's not that,” she answered softly, letting her hands fall. “I would not be happy here with such a change, Sheldon. It's true you are a part of the change, but I do not blame you for being swept into it. You are as full-spirited as your father was, and the fiery, revolutionary cause is exciting and adventurous to you as the peaceful, placid life could never be.”

“I have convictions, Aunt Florrie.” He spoke gently, but there was a current of immutable firmness in his voice.

“I know, I know,” she sighed, and moving back, she held him at

arm's length. "You may stay and help me to get ready if you wish. There are many things to discuss. I want to sell Bellevue, for I shall need the money; and the slaves—"

"I'll buy them," he offered quickly.

"Where would they go?"

"To Shipley."

"Then I will give them to you—all but Cora. She is going with me."

Sheldon shook his head. "You must let me buy them. If I had not come you would have sold them—"

Her thin lips began to tighten in their characteristic manner. "You will have them, Sheldon. I felt that you were coming, and besides," a reluctant smile quivered at the corners of her mouth, "I saw Lacey ride away and Cappy told me—"

"Aunt Florrie!" he cried, and sank into the chair at the window, burying his head in his hands.

10

WHEN the *Liberty*, under Captain Robertson, set sail from Ruffin's Ferry, on the twentieth of August, Sheldon, in as abject misery as he had ever felt, watched her moving out to sea before a westerly breeze. He could not lift his eyes to the deck, although he had seen Miss Florrie into her cabin where she maintained she was going to stay until the coast of Virginia was lost beyond the horizon. She was taking with her something of himself and of his father: strength and dignity and conviction of a proud line.

He took his eyes from the smooth wake of the *Liberty*, and throwing back his broad shoulders, breathed deeply. For the first time he was aware of the activity about him: of slaves rolling casks and hogsheads; of a team of oxen drawing cargo too heavy to be moved along the dock by hand; of shouting and cursing, and as an undercurrent to all the human activity, the incessant lapping of the river against the wharf. Suddenly he could stand it no longer. Jamming his three-cornered hat down on his head, he strode off toward Ruffin's Tavern where Lacey and Cappy waited with the horses. He wanted to get back to Hanover, join Will and the militia and try to forget this day.

But there were responsibilities to be discharged before he would be free again.

On the day that Sheldon rode down to Williamsburg from Shipley, where the Bellevue slaves had been installed, there was alarming news from Norfolk. Dunmore, across the Elizabeth River at Portsmouth in the *Otter*, ship-of-war, was trying to force the people back to allegiance. Despite the assurances of his officers that not the least encouragement would be shown the frightened negroes who ran for shelter to the British men-of-war in the harbor, they were allowed to remain. The bloody-backs had tricked the Norfolk patriots and their worst nightmare threatened to become a reality. Expecting their slaves, armed and liquored and encouraged by the British, to descend upon them and massacre them, they barred doors and windows, and the most hysterical citizens began to move up country. The eyes of all Virginians were turned with anger and revulsion upon affairs in the formerly peaceful and prosperous seaport.

"So she has gone!" Carter Braxton drew up a chair before the fire in his room at The Sign of the King's Arms, and gazed at the flames. Sheldon leaned against the mantel, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his dark blue corduroy coat, and let his eyes rest on the face of his friend. Coming back from Shipley, he had realized with a sudden flood of gratitude what security Colonel Braxton had come to represent to him during the years since his father's death. Braxton had never been too concerned with his own problems to share his, and the Colonel's problems were serious, he had no doubt, for worry had etched deeper the lines between his eyebrows, and erased all trace of humor from his eyes. His hair, Sheldon noticed, showed fresh streaks of gray.

"Yes. She has gone," Sheldon said quietly, "and I cannot tell you what a gap she has left. It's strange, sir, that although we never were together much, I felt as if something I had been fighting for was gone when she sailed away. Perhaps, without knowing it, I have been trying to prove to her that my convictions could be justified even by her Tory standards, but I think my strongest impulse was always to protect her. That stubborn self-reliance of hers would have seemed comical if she hadn't looked so pathetic, sitting in her cabin with

no one but Cora to look after her."

"She'll take care of herself." Braxton smiled. "It's not that that worries me. Her going is symbolic. From now on it will be brother against brother, and father against son. You may remember that I warned you of that. We have taken a position from which we cannot withdraw. I suppose you know that Mr. Henry has been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Virginia forces."

"No. I did not," Sheldon replied, restraining with difficulty his jubilation at the news. With Henry in the saddle, there would be action.

"However, if you wish to fight," Braxton told him, cupping his hands before the fire, "I would advise you to enlist in Colonel Woodford's regiment. There has been no official formation of the men, but the officers have been appointed, and Colonel Woodford is to have command of the second regiment. He is a seasoned veteran—"

"What of Mr. Henry?" Sheldon ventured.

"I hesitate to tell you the studied opinion regarding Mr. Henry, lest you construe it as prejudice, but supported as it is by General Washington, you may be sure it is just. Mr. Henry, as I have told you, is Commander-in-Chief of the Virginia forces, but as for taking command in the field, there is doubt of his ability. He is not a trained soldier. Pendleton is in favor of Henry's remaining in Williamsburg to protect the vicinity, should the occasion arise for sending out troops."

"Then why was Mr. Henry appointed Commander-in-Chief?"

"I myself did not vote for him," Braxton rejoined. "Those who supported him held the opinion that his great abilities in political life would assert themselves in the military field, and that Mr. Henry himself would not have solicited the appointment had he not thought himself qualified to command." He paused, seeing a look of curious appraisal in Sheldon's face. "I am in no sense a political rival of Mr. Henry's," he went on, "but I profess that the welfare of the colonies means as much to me as it does to him. You, yourself, if sitting in committee to choose a military leader, after your experience at Point Pleasant, must confess that your choice would not fall on Mr. Henry. As an organizer, and an inspiration, perhaps yes. But as a strategist, a military mind to combat the best that England can send to this country—no!"

"You are right, sir," Sheldon agreed. "When you ask me to remember Point Pleasant, you bring me to Colonel Woodford's banner."

"Then remember what I say," Braxton said sternly, "for Pendleton and I will take the brunt of any action which seems unfavorable to Mr. Henry. And now, tell me what is to become of Bellevue?"

"Bellevue is already a part of Mannsfield." Sheldon's voice dropped to a sober note. "Mann Page bought it. He told Aunt Florrie long ago that if she ever wanted to sell Bellevue he would give her a good price. Lacey is here with me, but all the other slaves have gone to Shipley."

"I see. You have just come from Shipley?" Sheldon felt there was caution in Braxton's question.

"Yes. There is something weird about an empty house at best," he mused. "But Shipley—" He shook his head. "It is like a nightmare to me." After a moment he said, "The crops are good."

"Very good," Braxton agreed. "It remains only to sell them for a suitable price. I must warn you, as a member of the Committee of Safety, that the non-importation agreement is going to be rigidly enforced, and that as long as you wish me to administer your business affairs, Shipley will be run to the letter of the agreement. Does Bacon understand that?"

"In every detail," Sheldon assured him, "whatever the sacrifice, which is more than I can say of Collin. It's he I blame for Aunt Florrie's decision to leave Virginia. He got into trouble with the Committee through some dealings with Captain Robertson. As it turned out, Robertson was blameless. They accused him of bringing in cargo from London and landing it at Urbanna. When the truth was known, it proved that he was merely landing some sugar and wine for a Mr. Bennet Brown of Norfolk. There were apologies in the *Gazette* which you probably saw, and we expected Collin to be sent back to Aunt Florrie with due explanation. But they discovered, while they had him in jail, that he *had* attempted to make arrangements for shipping tobacco to England after the tenth of September. I don't know what they're going to do with him. There is one thing certain, he won't have an easy time of it when they let him go. Purdie published the whole story in the *Gazette*."

Braxton nodded agreement. "I don't approve of their methods in many instances, but, by gad, the Sons of Liberty are sparing us many

unpleasant duties with respect to Loyalists, and Collin's case is the sort they delight to settle. By the way, Sheldon, I do not like to bring up a delicate subject, but I have some news for you of Evelyn Buford."

If he were burning at the stake, Sheldon felt, his blood could not have coursed hotter through his veins; and then, as suddenly as it had risen, it seemed to ebb, giving way to a cold and numb sensation.

Braxton's eyes sought the fireplace and he went on as if he wished for no personal note to intrude in his recital. "I had a letter from Eustice Buford. He is considerably worried about Evelyn. It seems that she was induced by Francis Foutré—you will recall our discussion of him—to act as a sort of unofficial agent of the Sons of Liberty in Williamsburg. Of course, Eustice is a brave man and a firm patriot, but he fears that the Tory element in Williamsburg is still capable of making trouble, and naturally he doesn't want Evelyn to be involved. His letter has cleared up one mystery which has intrigued me for some time—"

"You are not going to mention it!" Sheldon cried.

"No, I am not going to. But if the opportunity arises, I shall speak to Evelyn."

"It's Foutré's fault. He had no right to involve her!" Sheldon declared. He would find Foutré and deal with him yet. He must get away from here, make an excuse to leave—

"The situation has changed very much since the Governor's flight," Braxton went on in a voice whose calmness drove Sheldon to a frenzy of impatience. "Anything she has been able to do to help the organization will be treated as a patriotic act, but she would find herself in a dangerous position should the fortunes of the Loyalists change. I agree with Buford. It's no occupation for a woman."

Sheldon replied as casually as boiling indignation would permit, "I hope you will do your best to persuade her to go back to Petersburg, sir. She has always concerned herself too much with the affairs of men." He paused, hoping that Braxton would fill in the awkward interval, but he remained silent. "I think I must leave you now," he finished lamely. He wanted to ask Braxton where Evelyn was living, but he knew even if Braxton told him, he would never seek her out. Let her come to him. Instead he said, "I shall remember what you suggested about Colonel Woodford, sir. When do you think we

will be formed?"

"At once," Braxton replied. "Word of Mr. Henry's appointment brought out a vast number of volunteers. We will have no trouble filling the two regiments."

"Is Williamsburg to be our rendezvous?"

"Yes," Braxton sighed. "Williamsburg is to be the rendezvous."

11

WHEN Sheldon left The Sign of the King's Arms, he went straight to the Raleigh Tavern and enquired for Mr. Francis Foutré. Mr. Foutré, he was informed, had left Williamsburg on the thirtieth of May and had not, to anyone's knowledge, returned. Sheldon thanked his informant and stepped out onto Duke of Gloucester Street. What was he to do now? He could ride to Norfolk, but it was unlikely that Foutré had remained there so long. With Evelyn still in Williamsburg, and a crisis in affairs with the Governor rapidly approaching, he was certain to return to the capital. Dignity and common sense dictated a patient course. He turned toward the college and strolled slowly along under the avenue of broad maples. The weather was still intensely hot and the air heavy with humidity. Carriages, coaches and sedan chairs moved in and out of the long shadows that worked intricate patterns on the dusty street. Men in linen and summer serge, faces perspiring and bodies lax; women in cool silks and soft figured cotton and broad milan bonnets sauntered past him with languid gait. It was hard for Sheldon to reconcile this lazy summer day with the grim fact that in the fields west of the college the militia was drilling in preparation for the defense of the city; or to reconcile it with the fact that he, who was a part of the tranquil scene, was on his way to rejoin the militia, and had been in search of a man whom he wished to provoke to a violent show-down.

He began to reflect on the folly of the impulse that had led him to the Raleigh Tavern to enquire for Foutré, and realized that only sheer madness had persuaded him that he had the right to question the man's motives or judgment in inducing Evelyn to associate herself with the Sons of Liberty. He himself had no claim on her which

permitted him to protect or criticize her. He had angered her once by telling her that she was a woman and knew nothing of war. What would she think of him for daring to protest because she had chosen her own way of proving her usefulness to the Colony.

Head lowered and deep in thought, he ran headlong into Nathaniel Burwell. His friend from The Grove was equally preoccupied, and raising a broad-brimmed felt hat with a mumbled "your pardon, sir," was about to pass on when he recognized the master of Shipley. "Sheldon Hilliard!" he cried. His face brightened with pleasure. "How long has it been since we last met?"

"A good many months, sir," Sheldon returned, grateful for the pleasant distraction of an old friend's company.

"Sukey is furious with you," Burwell went on in a tone of reproof. "Colonel Braxton told us you were here, staying at the Raleigh, and we thought the least you could do was to pay your respects."

Sheldon colored and made a halting effort to excuse his remissness, but Burwell raised his hand in an indulgent gesture and brought it to rest on Sheldon's arm. "I told her you must have good reason for your silence, and that in these times one was wise not to question the behavior of one's friends!"

Sheldon smiled weakly. "I have been much occupied, and I have been in Williamsburg only a short while. Aunt Florrie has gone to England. I spent some time helping to settle her affairs."

"Surely not!" Burwell exclaimed, then quickly added, "Of course, she was a strong Tory, and if I might say so, a very determined lady in all things—"

"Yes. The change was too much for her." Sheldon's expression sobered.

"There are many like her, and I reckon they're better off in England. The patriots are making it mighty unhealthy for them. Miss Florrie could never have stood the strain." There was a moment's silence. "I heard through Colonel Braxton that you have seen service with the militia."

"That is so. Did he tell you the embarrassing nature of my service?"

"No, but being aware of your position, I can imagine what it was. None of us has escaped that predicament. John Randolph, who has been my friend as he was my father's, had very bitter words with me on the stand I have taken. He told me that he is taking his family

to England as soon as he can make the necessary arrangements."

"Then you have joined the militia, too?"

"Lieutenant Nathaniel Burwell, at your service." Burwell grinned. Taking a kerchief from his sleeve, he ran it lightly over his forehead. "God's teeth, it's hot. Come on to the Raleigh for some refreshment. You must join up with Colonel Christian. When he knows you fought at Point Pleasant you'll be as good as commissioned."

"Whose regiment?" Sheldon asked cautiously.

"Henry's."

"I'm told there'll be more action with Colonel Woodford."

Burwell looked up quickly. "You have in mind the opposition to Henry's command prevalent in certain quarters."

"I do not share it," Sheldon professed, "but I wish to fight if there is to be fighting."

"You will find the men intolerant of prejudice against Henry," Burwell informed him. "But let us go on, for after you've enlisted I want you to return to The Grove with me, and I shall take no refusal."

Will came to Williamsburg with the Volunteers from Hanover a week after Sheldon's enlistment in Captain Meade's company. He and Sheldon met only after drill, for Sheldon was still at The Grove, and when they did meet there was an unfamiliar coolness in Will's attitude. It did not take him long to vent his grievance, after he had recovered from the disappointment of finding Sheldon unmoved by his declaration that he had expected they would serve together as they had done ever since the Indian Expedition.

"Reckon you've turned against Colonel Henry," he accused.

"I've told you that I want to fight, as you do, Will, and that it's rumored that the Committee of Safety does not put much faith in Colonel Henry as a military leader. That does not mean that I agree, but I have no intention of staying in Williamsburg if Dunmore starts trouble on the Chesapeake."

"Dunmore is not the only enemy of Virginia," Will rejoined heatedly.

Sheldon looked at him with puzzled eyes. "You do not share my feeling for Lord Dunmore, Will? Or have you, perhaps, forgotten Point Pleasant? I felt we would always fight that battle together."

Will drew his tomahawk from his belt and felt the edge with a broad thumb, then measuring the distance through narrowed eyes, he picked

out the foremost of a clump of pines. The tomahawk, released from his practiced fingers, described several circles through the air before the sharp blade cleft a knot in the pine trunk.

“That’s all the trouble I’d take with Lord Dunmore.” He grinned.

PART VI

A NORFOLK LOYALIST

JOHN MURRAY, Earl of Dunmore, set about beating Virginia into submission by a series of depredations that shocked the country from Norfolk to Boston. He sent John Conolly to the Ohio to stir up the Indians against the settlers. Then, maddened by the weakness of his effect upon everyone except those Loyalists who were so committed to the Tory cause that they had become political and social outcasts—of those patriots with an eye to land grants who pinned on the red badge of Loyalty to curry favor—he brought every available British ship-of-war into his service, plundered the colony bordering on the Chesapeake and its tributaries, and carried off the people's slaves. Terrorized, many of the patriots fled from the coast rather than submit. Of the slaves who rowed out to the men-of-war like bewildered sheep to seek the freedom and protection Dunmore offered for support, many soon escaped as stealthily as they had gone out, to go in search of their masters. The lot of the Loyalists aboard the British ships was not a happy one. The coastal towns did all in their power to prevent food from reaching the ship, and the Governor's adherents were beginning to realize that the patriots were fighting them with deadly weapons. Ships driven to shore by storms found crowds of armed men ready to seize their cargoes, and escape because of general commotion was all that saved passengers and crew from hanging or imprisonment.

But Dunmore was not entirely without success. The *Kingfisher*, stationed near Norfolk and the *Otter* near Newport News, stopped all passing boats and subjected crews and passengers to assault and robbery and unbelievable indignities, while his smaller vessels, on marauding expeditions against the people of Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties, took heavy toll. At Kemp's Landing on the Elizabeth River, Dunmore surprised and captured a body of Minute-men under Colonel Hutchings and Colonel Lawson and confined the two officers aboard the *Bilbeck*.

When news of Dunmore's ravaging of the towns along the Chesa-

peake and his actions inland came to them through the *Gazette*, it was almost impossible to restrain the men drilling in their buckskins and motley in the fields behind the college. Copies of the paper passed from hand to hand till the words were scarcely legible and the pages were grimy and torn, and the picture which Purdie presented showed all too plainly the pathetic plight of refugees crowding Church Street in Norfolk and the road to Great Bridge. This same fate might befall their own families unless Dunmore was driven from the shores of Virginia.

"We need men with experience," Sheldon said to Will as they sat together beneath a brittle, golden beech on the drill field. "These recruits are so raw they make me feel like an old campaigner. Most of them don't know their right foot from their left, and they handle their guns as if they aren't real sure which is the business end. Good God, Will, a handful of Valley men could lick the whole lot of 'em."

"That's not countin' the Culpepper and Fauquier men," Will appended seriously. "They can shoot the stem off a hickory nut. But I know what you mean. It's these Tidewater men that blow a hole in our prestige. They make me feel I've got a right to be an Ensign—"

"You should be the Lieutenant and me the Ensign." Sheldon whipped off his broad brimmed felt hat, and ran his fingers through his hair.

A slow frown spread across Will's weather-tanned face. "I reckon I'll never understand how you can desert Henry for Woodford, and make so light of all our plans to fight together. We've been countin' on that ever since Point Pleasant."

"It's not desertion! You must see that! I'm in Henry's camp as you are, Will. But I want to fight." He picked up a sprig and began to chew on it, spitting out particles of bark. "If what I told you about the Committee is true, and they're going to restrain Henry, I'm against every last one of them, but it's not Colonel Woodford's fault, and I don't want to be drilling in these fields when they're fighting Dunmore down on the Chesapeake. Now that's a fact."

"I reckon Henry'll fight, in spite of what you say. He's not the man to sit here twiddling his thumbs, either."

Will was right. Patrick Henry kept up his cry for action, confident of the staunch support of his men. Whenever he appeared on the training field, the eyes of the soldiers drew fire from his, their steps

quicken and brown hands tightened on muskets and rifle-stocks. What matter if they didn't look much like the King's pretty redcoats. They could fight and they would follow Henry wherever he led them, with bucktails switching from their caps and knives swinging from their belts. Give them a chance, they clamored, and give Colonel Henry a chance, too. But Edmund Pendleton, in Williamsburg with a quorum of the Committee, had his way.

So it was that of the nine companies of regulars under arms, Colonel Woodford's second regiment was sent to relieve Suffolk and march on to Norfolk, and Will was left with the first regiment to cool his heels in Williamsburg. Colonel Henry's orders from the Committee to stand ready to protect Williamsburg, Burwell's Ferry, Jamestown and Yorktown from attack did not mislead Henry or his men from the fact that Colonel Woodford had been selected for the most vital defense of Virginia. It was a slap in the face for the leader from Hanover.

Walking his horse along the winding road to Jamestown with Captain Meade's company, Sheldon felt Will's absence strongly. He'd be a little surer of himself if Will were at his side, particularly since this new commission gave him such a violent sense of responsibility. Sometimes, when he thought of it, his heart jumped to his throat. For his eyes, scanning the ranks of men who might, in the midst of battle, look to him for leadership, reminded him of another expedition when Will guided him and Glen through the first confusing days on the Kanawha.

To these seven hundred patriots—some in buckskins, some in motley, the Culpepper men in green with "Liberty or Death" written in white across their shirt fronts—the enemy was oppression in the form of every redcoat they would meet. But to him and Will the enemy was embodied in the treacherous, cowardly person of Lord Dunmore, and it seemed unfair that they should not be fighting him together.

His thoughts still running in a doleful channel, he put spurs to Nero and rode up beside Lieutenant Travis. They had reached the Jamestown Ferry where Colonel Scott and Major Spottswood were directing the crossing. A raw, biting wind blew off the river, cut through woolen coats and chilled the marrow. Travis returned Sheldon's brisk salute with a jerk of his arm and beat his gloved hands together.

"It's cold as an old maid's kiss," he complained, tugging at his horse's reins. "If it keeps up we'll freeze to death in Norfolk. Pity those poor devils without greatcoats." He nodded toward a group of militiamen in homespun breeches and coats and long woolen mufflers. "Look at their shoes, too. It's a wonder to me the Committee couldn't have found boots for 'em!"

Once across the river at Sandy Point, the patriots swung southeast to join the main body of troops. Alert as hounds on a scent, the regiment now moved toward Suffolk, but when word of their approach reached Dunmore, he abandoned the town and retired with his Loyalists to Great Bridge. The confidence which this retreat gave the cold, inadequately armed patriots was evident in their noisy good humor as they made preparations to pitch camp.

They were not long in the Suffolk camp.

"Just as well we're moving on," Travis told Sheldon, "these men want to fight even if they are dog-tired." They had come to fight the bloody lobster-backs and they had no mind to sit down and wait for them to do the attacking.

The following morning Scott led his men out of camp along the road to Great Bridge.

Time and again, as the long column neared its destination, refugees on foot with bundles slung over their shoulders and others in wagons piled high with household goods moved by, finding breath and spirit to cheer the motley force.

In the strained, frightened faces of these people driven from their homes, Sheldon thought the patriots must find all the incentive they needed to fight off cold and discomfort and the British all together. Back in Suffolk, after they had picked up some Tories, it was all Colonel Scott could do to prevent the men from hanging them. They were probably sorry now that they hadn't gone ahead and strung them higher than Haman.

"We'll soon see what a fox Dunmore is." Travis broke into Sheldon's thoughts as the long column slowed down. Caterpillar-like, it seemed to hump in the middle before it halted. "We're getting close to Bachelor's Mill."

"That's the point Colonel Woodford was discussing in staff meeting," Sheldon reminded himself aloud.

"Precisely. And you can see why." Travis's eyes moved over the

heavy, swampy land. "If Dunmore has fortified Bachelor's Mill, we'll be lucky to get in sight of Norfolk." He rubbed his thumb along his jawbone. "I'd give a deal to know if the information we have on the number of Dunmore's regulars is accurate. It's said to be not more than two hundred."

"I don't know this country, sir. How far will it reduce our chances of success if Bachelor's Mill is defended?" Sheldon asked.

"This far," Travis told him through tight lips. "It'll be a struggle to pass to Great Bridge. We'll have to do as Colonel Scott says, and cross well below. There's pieces of solid ground at each end of Great Bridge. They're like islands, surrounded by water and marsh. A devilish country to fight over. Then a causeway connects the islands with the mainland. Dunmore can command the causeway with cannon, and it would be slaughter if we tried to attack over it."

"But if Dunmore attacks first?"

"That's what we hope for, of course, but if there is trouble at Bachelor's Mill, there might not be enough of us left to stand off an attack."

"Thank God those Culpepper men can shoot!" Sheldon laughed.

When Colonel Scott's party passed Bachelor's Mill, which Dunmore, in his over-confidence, had neglected to defend, they quickened their steps southeast to Great Bridge with renewed eagerness. Fleeing patriots they met along the road told them that Dunmore had fortified a stockade on the Norfolk side of the bridge with his regulars and that the Tories and negroes who had fled to his protection were posted at the bridge itself.

Sheldon thought longingly of the thick cover of the Kanawha country. "I'd rather fight on the Ohio than here. All this marsh land and only one real approach to the enemy— The Valley men would make short work of Dunmore out there!"

There was a strange feeling of constriction about the patriots' position, in spite of the open, flat nature of the country. Osiers and tall coarse grass covered the marsh, and as the force approached the bridge, they saw that from the end of the causeway on the southern side, a street ascended about four hundred yards to a church. It was like fighting in an uptilted rectangular box.

"There's Captain Taliaferro down below the enemy's boat guard,"

Travis mused. "And a boat guard opposite the British guard above that. We're not so badly off with our communications open."

"We could have nothing to rely upon more to our advantage than Lord Dunmore's stupidity," Sheldon replied, and Travis nodded, smiling grimly.

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THERE had been little activity since the provincials arrival at Great Bridge, except the spasmodic firing of cannon and muskets from the stockade fort.

"I don't like it," Travis told Sheldon. They were lying in their tent on blankets. "Our scouts say Dunmore has two hundred and fifty over there, mostly blacks. Captain Taliaferro sent some men around to the enemy's rear with a guide, and they report it will be perfectly possible to cut off the British between two fires. That sounds all too easy. Of course, if Howe gets here in time, we'll be well supported."

"How many is he bringing up?"

"Four or five hundred with cannon and ammunition. Woodford says there're nine hundred men at different places in motion to join us. I don't know, Hilliard; it might easily be another Breed's Hill. We simply haven't got the ammunition or the arms to stand off a long-drawn-out attack, and I'm afraid Dunmore knows it."

"I'd like to see Captain Sayre's company down here. I know at least one man in it who could do more damage to those God-damned redcoats than any five regulars we've got."

"There's no use fooling ourselves," Travis mused, his voice husky with fatigue. "The Grenadiers and regulars of the fourteenth can fight, and they'll do it. That regiment of Scotch Tories Dunmore's gotten up and called the 'Queen's Own Loyal Virginians' and that pack of runaway slaves he calls the 'Ethiopian Corps'—hell, they're hardly worth the trouble of shooting! But he's got guns and powder, and he's too quiet!"

"PERHAPS Lord Dunmore can be induced to attack," Colonel Scott ventured at a staff meeting in his tent on the hill. On a rough plank table the battle plan was spread, and Lieutenant Travis was bent over it, studying the position at which he was ordered to throw up a breastwork. Scott, leaning over his shoulder, jabbed the position with his forefinger. "That will undoubtedly be the focal point of attack, Lieutenant Travis, and you must do everything in your power to hold it."

Travis looked up at the swarthy, tight-skinned face of the Colonel. "With the assistance of Lieutenant Hilliard, I trust that we will, sir."

Sheldon, standing at the tent flap, felt his face grow hot. It was kind of Lieutenant Travis to mention him, but he was beginning to feel himself unworthy of the commission that he had once been bold enough to hint for. There was Major Marshall of the Culpepper Minute-men, a real veteran of the Indian Wars, and Major Spottswood, and Captain Meade, and when they turned to him, it seemed that their glances were speculative.

Major Marshall moved up to the table and ran his eyes over the plan. A large man, he seemed to tower over the others. His long face and compressed lips showed the same stubbornness and determination that came through his words to Colonel Scott. "You are right, sir. There is no doubt but that we must hope for Dunmore to attack. He must be made to, and I think I know a means of accomplishing it."

All eyes questioned him. "I have a servant I can trust to follow instructions. With your permission, I shall send him to the enemy under pretense of desertion from us. He will inform Lord Dunmore that there are not more than three hundred dirty-shirts—as the British in their finery are pleased to call us"—his stern face relaxed in a faint grin—"and if I know His Lordship's character at all, he'll swell like a toad and attack our works. We will then look to Lieutenants Travis and Hilliard—" When he turned around to face these officers mentioned, his shrewd eyes softened a little. "And I am sure they will succeed in their duty."

Scott nodded solemnly. "A good suggestion, Major." The sudden roar of a cannon ended in a thud on the hill below headquarters, and was followed shortly by the rattle of muskets. Over the noise Scott

continued: "Captain Meade, double the guard in the bridge houses tonight." His head turned slowly around the circle of officers. "You must do everything in your power to keep up the spirits of the men. I have dispatched a letter to the Convention asking them to send us the greater part of the first regiment, with ammunition and cannon—and shoes. God knows how they expect men to fight in this weather with their feet in rags, and the arms they sent down from Williamsburg the other day are more fit for lumber than for men's hands; but we've got to forget that and make the best of a pitiable situation."

"The Carolina troops, begging your pardon, Captain"—Spottswood nodded to the officer of those troops and returned his address to Scott—"are not to be completely relied upon. They are under no obligation to remain here, though I am sure Colonel Howe will keep them in service when he arrives. The worst of it is they're badly armed and their cannon aren't even mounted."

"I know that," Scott replied fiercely, "but I would welcome shoes and blankets even more. I've already lost Captain Taliaferro from the guard downriver—sick with pleurisy, as you know. It's a hellish business!"

How hellish it was, Sheldon realized on inspection rounds with Lieutenant Travis the night of January ninth. The frozen ground had temporarily thawed, leaving churned mud that gave no footing in the breastwork. The shivering figures and gaunt faces he passed, moving through the camp, gave him little hope that the weakest assault could be repulsed. All the flour and corn to be had was in Norfolk, and the houses which were safe from the enemy's cannon would shelter only a few of the men. Lacey, in the servants' quarters, told him there wasn't a wisp of hay or fodder for the horses, and Sheldon knew by the look of Lacey that if he'd had anything to eat in the last twelve hours, it wasn't more than would fill a back tooth.

He could scarcely look toward the British stockade fort across the bridge without a whipping surge of rage. Lord Dunmore and his followers, who had perpetrated all this suffering, were warm enough, well-fed and well-armed. Even the servants and horses, according to the Tory prisoners, had plenty of victuals to keep up their courage and clean, dry straw to lie on. With cattle and sheep being driven into Norfolk by the country people there was no prospect of hunger

in Dunmore's camp. Not only were the Tories comfortable and well-fed; they were protected by ample arms and ammunition as the patriots ought to be.

Sheldon tried not to betray his mounting anxiety and resentment against the Committee. A good officer gave his men confidence, but it wasn't likely they'd get much from him, feeling the way he did. If the effort that had gone into political haggling had been spent in finding supplies for the Virginians, their purpose would have been better served.

Ever since they had arrived, the patriots had been exposed to spasmodic musket fire and cannonade. The guards in the houses by the bridge, withdrawing before daybreak, escaped the fire, but if Travis should need reinforcements in the breastwork, the men, moving down from the hill, would walk into the mouth of Dunmore's cannon. Maybe, Sheldon reflected gloomily, the patriots had bitten off more than they could chew this time.

The beat of reveille followed by the rattle of muskets broke the black hush of early morning. Hardly had the echo died when the thunder of two cannon from the British fort roused the patriots from their sleep of exhaustion. Sheldon and Travis heard the call to stand to arms.

"Sounds like they mean business, this time," Travis cried as they hurried to Woodford's tent. The officers, gathered to await further orders, were grim-faced, but the Colonel, whose cheeks and brow were flushed with the expectation of battle, actually looked relieved. Scarcely had Travis's head appeared through the tent opening than Woodford summoned him forward.

"Take your men to the breastwork on the double," he commanded. "And for God's sake, Lieutenant, hold it as long as you can." He dismissed Travis with a nervous gesture and turned to Colonel Stevens of the Culpepper battalion.

It seemed to Sheldon that he had hardly taken his position in the breastwork before the enemy crossed the bridge on hastily laid planks. They came on slowly but surely, lines of white legs and cross-belts. Where the enemy marched bearing torches, the red coats and tall, black hats of the grenadiers identified the attackers. When they reached the island, several figures burning pine torches detached themselves from the ranks and entered the few houses still standing.

Flames seemed to explode from the frame buildings, and at the same time several large piles of shingles were fired. The conflagration lit up the bridge, the causeway, and the men who were now rapidly approaching the breastwork with fixed bayonets. Sheldon fingered the hilt of his sword and stole a quick glance at Travis. The young Lieutenant had taken in the situation, which was easy to see in the welcome light. Grenadiers and regulars led a motley band of Tories and negroes. Travis gave orders in a rasping voice to the men about him, then turning, ran along the line repeating them with emphatic little jerks of his head.

"Reserve your fire till they're within fifty yards, boys, then give it to 'em as fast as you can."

Long-barrelled rifles and muskets, resting on the parapet, settled firmly. Grim faces pressed against cold stocks, and stiff fingers played along smooth triggers.

From two British cannon on the edge of the island facing the left of the breastwork a brisk fire commenced, but still the patriots, their aim set on the cross-belts of the enemy, held their fire. There was no sound now from the shirtmen save their heavy, nervous breathing.

There was something menacing in the quick, solid advance of the British regulars and grenadiers, so superbly trained and uniformed. The sight of them was enough to wither the confidence of men whose training had been concentrated into a few weeks and whose clothes gave them the appearance of scarecrows.

The face of the British captain—Fordyce, they had been told—became clear. The lines of it were tense and the reflection of the burning buildings set his eyes aglow like those of some oriental idol.

"I don't believe he sees us, sir!" Sheldon whispered to Travis, who merely nodded. The muscles in the Lieutenant's jaws worked convulsively. His eyes were fastened on Captain Fordyce, whose steps slackened momentarily.

Think of fighting in a wig. Sheldon took comfort in the irrelevant thought, but it had scarcely raced through his mind before Fordyce snatched his hat from his head, and waving it above him, shouted, "The day is our own!"

His cry was the signal for a rush toward the redoubt. Travis's hand rose and fell, and immediately, from the long barrels resting on the parapet, fire spurted simultaneously with the report of ninety guns

as the patriots rose to their feet to meet the assault.

Sheldon, bracing one foot against a mound of slippery mud, and clutching his sword in readiness, saw that Fordyce kept pressing forward, although the lower half of his face was a reddish-yellow pulp and blood darkened his coat in a dozen places. When he fell not more than fifteen steps from the breastwork, Sheldon shook his fascinated gaze from the long body and saw that of the front ranks of grenadiers and regulars hardly one was on his feet. The acrid smell of smoke, the animal-like groans of the wounded and the cries of the terrified survivors hit him suddenly like the kick of a mule in the stomach. Nausea rose and he swallowed hard to force it back. Then as a Captain of the regulars rushed forward from the island over the bridge, shouting to the negroes and Tories behind him and to the regulars on the bridge to come on, he heard Travis screaming, "Keep it up, boys! Reinforcements are coming!"

The cannon from the hill had opened on the British ranks, now moving, at their Captain's wild command, in irregular confusion toward the redoubt. At the same time the four-pounders and wall pieces from the British fort, as well as the two pieces directed from the island against the breastwork, kept up a constant, raking fire. Exposed though the reinforcements were as they advanced down the open face of the hill, to Sheldon, who threw a quick glance over his shoulder, it looked as if the line were unbroken.

The sentinels in the houses by the bridge were giving the redcoats hell. Billy Flora, posted behind some shingles, kept on firing until he had diverted a whole platoon. Sheldon watched him with a surge of admiration. Billy had said "he'd be buttered" if he didn't cause a little harm on his own account and he was as good as his word. But it looked as if they had him now. The concerted fire of the platoon was sending the shingles flying. Then, in the very midst of it, Billy rose with a yell, sprinted over the causeway and leaped into the breastwork, just as the reinforcements from the hill began pouring in. It seemed a miracle that they hadn't dropped a man. For the first time Sheldon realized that they were beating the British regulars. Field pieces had raked the whole length of the street and thrown double-headed shot as far as the church and yet the patriots had come down without a casualty!

Colonel Stevens with his Culpepper battalion was moving around

to the left, pouring volley after volley into the British flank. In open terror, now, Tories and negroes led the retreat across the bridge, stumbling and lurching over one another in complete confusion. Over their shouts and curses and the dreadful cries and groans of the wounded, Woodford, jumping into the redoubt, bellowed his command to open fire from all points. The British Captain was having a battle of his own with the remnant of his regulars who were so infuriated by their defeat that they refused to retreat. Brandishing his sword, he screamed threats and curses at the foremost until, reluctantly, they began to fall back.

As the fire slackened, the scene before them struck the patriots with terrible violence. Entrails spilled from the gaping belly of a sergeant of regulars within full view of the redoubt. Rolling back and forth in the mud, the sergeant butted against a grenadier who was dragging himself along on one leg, clutching his throat. From the grenadier's fingers bright streams of blood spurted. For a moment Sheldon watched, galvanized by the horror of the man's agony. Then, suddenly, with a rasping cry, he was over the breastwork simultaneously with several others from the long line who could not wait for orders to bring in the wounded. The grenadier, humping his back like a cat, flopped to the ground as Sheldon reached him. A wailing cry for water drew his eyes to one of the Norfolk Tories wearing an ordinary green suit. The man's fleshy face was nearly purple with pain. When he saw Sheldon approaching him, wild terror blanched his skin. "For the love of God, don't murder me!" he cried, crawling backward like a crab.

Sheldon saw then that a stain as big as his head darkened the Tory's green breeches at the thigh, and that the cloth was caught in the wound. He bent down, intending to sling the man's arm around his shoulder and help him back to the redoubt, but the Tory continued to slide backward.

"No one's going to murder you," Sheldon told him gently. There was something very familiar about the Tory's face, but he couldn't be bothered now to remember where he had seen it before. Sheldon felt such a swell of pity for this poor devil whose reason seemed to have cracked under fear and pain that he could think only of getting him back to Dr. Brown as fast as possible. "Just put your arm around my neck. Can you hop along if I help you?"

Finally, convinced that Sheldon was not going to kill him, the Tory nodded and made an effort to get to his feet. With a firm grip around the man's waist, Sheldon took a cautious step forward. His burden became heavier, sagged and slipped from his arm. He carried him back over his shoulder and laid him on the muddy floor of the breastwork. "Man badly wounded," he yelled to a white-faced private. "Get Dr. Brown." Then he clambered over the wet, sticky earth of the breastwork again. In company with several grimy shirt-men whose faces were black with powder marks, he prowled among the red and white figures littering the ground, in search of the wounded. As he moved forward, following the sound of a wail, the British Captain who had rallied the regulars after the first slaughtering fire of the Virginians, stepped out from the fort, and in full view of British and Colonials, bowed his thanks to the rescuers.

It wasn't until later that the Virginians learned what threat Dunmore had used to stir up the hatred of his men for the patriots. "He said you'd scalp us," a wounded Ensign told young Lieutenant Marshall, son of the Major. Marshall threw back his head and began to laugh. He, too, had helped to bring in the stricken men, and had been puzzled by their terrified screams for mercy.

Colonel Woodford came down the line, congratulating his men who had collapsed, dead-tired, against the walls of the breastwork. "The enemy have given their word not to fire till we have brought all the wounded in," he told Travis.

"I believe we have all that the British themselves haven't removed, sir," Travis reported.

"Good!" Woodford wiped his eyes with a soiled handkerchief. "Lieutenant Batut of the grenadiers wants to send word of our humane treatment of the wounded to the fort. God knows they must have thought we were a pack of savages. I'm sending Ensign Holmes with a flag and I want you to accompany him."

"Yes, sir!" Travis made off down the line, and Woodford turned to Sheldon.

"This was a fine piece of work, Lieutenant."

"Lieutenant Travis's orders were well-conceived, sir," Sheldon said quickly.

"Your part was not inconspicuous," Woodford observed. "Men take courage from their officers, and the men in your section withheld their

fire bravely. One premature shot would have ruined the plan."

"Thank you, sir."

Woodford walked on, and Sheldon turned back to the wounded. With Travis gone to the fort, he was in command of the ninety provincials who had held the breastwork. Most of them were tending the wounded, keeping up a constant cry for Dr. Brown.

A beefy sergeant of militia ran up to Sheldon and saluted. "Only one wounded—Private Banner, sir—in the hand. Seventeen British wounded. One with a ball in the thigh, sir, won't let us touch him without puttin' up a bloody rumpus."

"Where is he?" Sheldon asked, and followed the square figure of the sergeant as he turned to lead the way.

"There he is, sir. Touched in the head, I reckon he is. Thinks we're trying to murder him."

Sheldon knelt down beside the wounded Tory. If Satan himself had bent over him, the man couldn't have let out a more blood-curdling scream. Of a sudden, Sheldon remembered him—the first of the two men he had brought in. He had seen this face before in Hanover. He caught the Tory's jerking arms and held them firmly, saying gently, as if to a child, "Drinkwater, be quiet; we're not going to hurt you."

Drinkwater stared at him with bright, pain-shot eyes. "For God's sake, don't murder me!" he whimpered.

"Here, sergeant, he's all right. Just temporarily—" Sheldon touched his head. "Get him up there. He's lost a lot of blood."

"Aye, an' they all have," the sergeant grunted. "Place is a damned puddle o' blood an' brains out there." He jerked his head toward the bridge and ordered two privates at hand to attend to Drinkwater.

The second morning after the battle, a gaunt-faced stranger in a civilian suit of blue serge rode across the brow of the hill and, seeing Sheldon returning from headquarters, pulled his horse up across the path.

"Can you direct me to Colonel Woodford?" the newcomer inquired.

"I will tell Colonel Woodford you wish to see him, sir, if you will give me your name."

"My name is William Calvert, but that will convey nothing to Colonel Woodford."

"Then perhaps it will save time if you will tell me what you wish to see him about."

• "You may tell the Colonel that he will not regret hearing what I have to say."

"If you will follow me—" Sheldon walked across the hill to Woodford's tent, then turned to Calvert. "Wait here, please."

Calvert drew rein.

When Sheldon entered his tent, Woodford was writing a letter. His tricorn sat jauntily on the back of his head and his greatcoat was wrapped about him. He lifted heavy brows in annoyance at the interruption.

"There is a Mr. William Calvert asking to see you, sir," Sheldon told him.

"What does he want?" Woodford barked.

"He won't say, sir. Just that you won't regret hearing what it is."

Woodford groaned. "I've been trying all morning to make this dispatch intelligible. Well, bring him in! And, Lieutenant—don't leave until I tell you to."

Sheldon withdrew, returning in a moment with Calvert. Woodford nodded to him, but did not speak.

"I have come to give you news of the British, sir," Calvert began.

Woodford's eyes widened suspiciously. Very likely this was one of Dunmore's traps, but it would do no harm to hear the man out.

"My brother, Max Calvert, who belongs to the Sons of Liberty, as I do, sir—" He paused. "If you know aught of the Norfolk Sons, sir, you will know that there are five Calverts who are members, all proud to support the patriot cause. But, as I was saying, my brother escaped from Norfolk at five o'clock this morning to Kemp's Landing where I had fortunately arrived some days ago. He asked me to bring you word that the British lost a hundred and two killed and wounded and have quitted their breastwork."

Woodford's shrewd glance brightened. True enough, there had been no signs of activity in the British breastwork, but Major Marshall's servant had played just such a trick on the British. Told them the patriots were melting their shoe buckles to make shot. "Go on, Mr. Calvert," Woodford said.

"When Dunmore got news of the British defeat he raved like a madman and threatened to hang the boy who brought it. Now,

sir, the Scotch Tories are making for Dunmore's ships as fast as they can, and the people of Norfolk are preparing to send you a petition." He stopped and seemed to study Woodford's expression for the effect of his words.

Sheldon thought the Colonel was pleased and relieved by the news Calvert had brought him, but he seemed reluctant to make either his pleasure or relief evident. Through faintly narrowed eyes he was scrutinizing his informant. Finally he said, "The Sons of Liberty, I presume, have been forced to cover."

"Very much so. But when Lord Dunmore and his soldiers quit Norfolk altogether, we intend offering ourselves to your service, sir. We assume you will occupy the town." He coughed behind a cambric handkerchief. "We are kept informed of the progress of affairs by Mr. Francis Foutré, who has taken this important task upon himself."

In the tent opening, Sheldon started. He might have known Foutré's hand would be in this. Then he was struck by a sudden possibility. He might kill two birds with one stone—be a part of the military machine that was driving Dunmore from the colony, and settle his quarrel with Foutré!

Woodford's voice came to him as from a distance. "If you wish to stay here for the time being, you may. I will have quarters prepared for you. But I warn you, you will have to put up with great discomfort."

"Thank you, sir, but I am returning to Kemp's."

"What was your impression of that man, Lieutenant?" Woodford asked when Calvert had gone.

"I believe he is genuine, sir. "It's easy enough to prove whether or not he has told you the truth."

"Very," Woodford agreed. "Tonight the bridge and causeway will be repaired. I am sending Colonel Stevens with six companies to Kemp's, and if Calvert's account is confirmed, I shall proceed to Norfolk. In the meantime, I'd like a word with our prisoners and I want you to attend me. I sent my aide with orders to take all the wagons we can spare to Suffolk and Cobbin to get flour. Lieutenant, remember this. There are a few things that will break down the courage and endurance of the bravest soldiers—one is cold and the other

is hunger. They can take a certain amount of both, but there is a limit. We have about reached that limit." He adjusted his hat, hooked his greatcoat at the neck and stamped out of the tent.

The church was but a few steps from Woodford's quarters. Men passed in and out in a constant stream. Those who were not carrying water or basins, were going in on any pretext to get out of the cold. The wind was so sharp and the sky so overcast that midday brought no warmth. Most of the men had bound their dilapidated shoes in rags to protect their exposed toes from the frozen ground, and those whose shoes had been sucked off by the mud during the long march, had wrapped their feet in their shirts, leaving hairy, dirt-cruste'd chests unprotected from the cutting wind and damp air. Sheldon couldn't suppress a wry grimace at the pitiable condition of the provincials. The victors were a sorry-looking lot of men.

Woodford elicited a little information from two or three of the seventeen wounded before Dr. Brown drew his attention to Drinkwater.

"One of Dunmore's Tories, Colonel," he explained. "A bit touched from shock. I reckon this is his first taste of war. He's been spinning a long story, but I don't know how much of it it's wise to believe."

"Don't scalp me," Drinkwater whined, his wide, pleading eyes on the bulky figure of the Colonel standing over him. "Kill me if you want to, but don't scalp me."

"Dunmore made an impression on him." The doctor's leathery skin creased in a frown.

"They're all leaving," Drinkwater ran on in a monotone. "The ships are filled with people, but they're nearly starving. The dirty-shirts took our guns and powder and ball, but they're brave men left. At night they row out to the ships and take food." He reached out and took hold of Woodford's coat. As if to emphasize his words, he gave it a tug. "There's smallpox aboard. The blacks are spreading it to the women and children."

Woodford knelt down beside him. "Who are rowing out to the ships?"

Without hesitation, Drinkwater went on: "Lord Dunmore warned us not to trust the dirty-shirts. Said they'd scalp every prisoner they took—"

"We're not going to scalp you. Who are rowing out to the ships?" Woodford repeated, his eyes holding Drinkwater to the thread of his thought.

"Tom Norris and Speddin and Desmond sent their slaves with food and wine and some medicine every day—"

Woodford turned to Sheldon whose face had gone ashen.

"Mark those names, Lieutenant."

Sheldon was staring malevolently at Drinkwater, wishing he had left him on the blood-soaked causeway. "Lieutenant!" Woodford commanded sharply, and Sheldon's eyes turned back to him.

"Sir?"

"What in God's name is the matter with you? I said to remember Norris, Speddin and Desmond." Woodford turned back to the doctor.

"How seriously is this man wounded?" he asked, rising from the prisoner's side.

The doctor tapped the end of a probe on his thumbnail. "Ball in his thigh, Colonel. Wound's infected. I may have to amputate his leg."

Serves him damned well right, Sheldon thought, and then suddenly felt a wave of compassion for the Desmonds' faithless friend. If this was retribution for betrayal, the price was high enough. Perhaps too high if he were talking in delirium.

Outside the church the clean, biting air felt good. The stench of infected wounds and blood, and the sickening, sweaty odor of the wounded had been almost unbearable. Woodford turned to Sheldon with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes. "The sight sickens you, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir!" Sheldon protested. "It's never pleasant, but it was not the sight nor the smell which sickened me."

THE first free moment he had after the march into Norfolk, Sheldon sought out Christopher Desmond. He had not fled to the British men-o'-war like most of the Tories, but had remained defiantly in his square brick house on Church Street.

"What are they going to do to us?" he demanded of Sheldon. Sarah sat beside her uncle with her hand resting reassuringly on his arm.

Sheldon tried to make as light as he could of the punishment, for he could see that Desmond was suffering from a very reasonable fear. "Colonel Woodford has arrested the Tories who have been in arms against us and is going to send them to Williamsburg to be tried by the Committee. They are prisoners of war, sir, and you must admit that had Dunmore defeated us, he would probably have hanged us all as a matter of course."

"And those who have not been in arms?"

"They will have a chance to declare their allegiance to the Colony."

Sheldon felt uncomfortable with Sarah's eyes burning accusingly through him, but he had a debt to pay and he was determined to pay it. "I would like to help you, sir, but it is going to be difficult, since Colonel Woodford knows you have given aid to Dunmore."

"That is not true," Desmond denied vehemently. "I am a Loyalist, but I do not hold with the Governor's policy."

"But you sent your slaves to the ships with food!"

Sarah stiffened. "That is a lie, Lieutenant Hilliard."

Sheldon held out a protesting hand. "Miss Desmond, it's not I who am lying, then. What I tell you is information given to Colonel Woodford by Mr. Drinkwater, whom we took prisoner when he was wounded."

"Paul?" Her eyes and her voice were incredulous. "But he stood in this very room when my uncle told Mr. Norris and Mr. Speddin that he wouldn't send Jonas with the boats. I heard Uncle Chris say it myself, and when they accused him of rebel sympathies, he said just what he did to you, now." She turned eyes warm with affection on her uncle. "They've no right to treat you like this." But when she looked at Sheldon again, they held no warmth. "Either Paul is crazy or he's deliberately trying to hurt Uncle Chris because of me."

"That is what I suspected," Sheldon admitted, with deep relief, "but I felt it my duty to warn you. I only need your word, sir," he assured Desmond, "to convince me that there is no truth in the charge, though I must also confess I would have thought it humanity on your part to have sent the food. You have never made a secret of your Loyalism."

The remark stung Desmond. Heatedly, he retorted. "If I did not succor the poor people aboard Lord Dunmore's ships it was because I was more concerned about the safety of my niece. What good for-

tune has spared us from your marauding soldiers, even in these first few hours, I don't know."

"Dunmore has driven the patriots to every act they've committed," Sheldon replied hotly.

"And we have suffered for it," Desmond cried, "even more than you."

Sheldon rose from his chair beside the window and moved to the fireplace, warming his hands at the meager blaze. "From the beginning, Dunmore has bred suspicion and distrust among us," he reminded Desmond bitterly. "A great many Loyalists have made his course easier by breaking the Association and leaving us no alternative but to punish them. Because we've upheld our laws, Dunmore has tried to brand us as savages. At Great Bridge, the wounded shrank from us, screaming for mercy, because he had told them we'd scalp them. Drinkwater, himself, is a victim of that fear." He paused for a moment to see what effect his news of Drinkwater would have on Sarah. Except that her face was uncommonly pale, it seemed to have none. He went on, quietly: "What damage our men do will be confined to the property of active Tories. They have strictest orders, as you no doubt read in Colonel Woodford's proclamation to the people, to do no harm to anyone unless he attempts to resist."

"In a way I'm relieved to hear what you say of poor Drinkwater," Desmond said, the flush of anger fading. "I can't feel he would deliberately betray us. He was here as our guest, Sheldon, and while Sarah gave him little enough encouragement, I do not think he had cause for such animosity."

It seemed to Sheldon that Desmond's heavy body sagged with despair. There was a helplessness in his words and attitude that was difficult to reconcile with the pompous individual he had met at The Grove.

"What am I to do? Above everything else, I want to protect Sarah. My own punishment, if the Committee wish to deal harshly with me, is of no importance."

Color flooded Sarah's face. "I will share whatever happens to you, Uncle Chris. Don't think it will be otherwise."

"Let me handle this, please, Sarah." Desmond's eyes bored into Sheldon. "I have read Colonel Woodford's proclamation, and in it he declares his intention to assist us. If that is so, then we're safe, for

we've done nothing but live here quietly. I'm proud to be a Loyalist—a firm Loyalist—and I would toast the King before Woodford and the Continental Congress. If that is punishable, then I'll willingly take my punishment. But I must also tell you this. You spoke of my humanity, or rather implied my lack of it. In one of my bedrooms upstairs, if you care to look, you will find Captain Fortescue of the fourteenth regiment. He is an old friend of mine, and when he was wounded and brought to Norfolk during the retreat, he asked to be carried here."

Sheldon frowned in sudden alarm, then he smiled bleakly. "I think you will find Colonel Woodford humane enough to understand that. I'm going to headquarters now, and put your case before him. At present you're under grave suspicion. There's not much time to be lost. Why didn't you make an effort to escape, sir, when you heard how the battle had gone? You could so easily have gone aboard one of the ships."

"I will not be driven from my home!" Desmond retorted. "And I would not call those ships a haven. They are plague-ridden, and when I say the people aboard them are starving, I speak the sober truth of every one of them."

"Yes, I know that. But I reckon it's beside the point since you are here. Tomorrow Colonel Woodford is resigning his command to Colonel Howe. That may alter the course we take, so I'm bound to see Woodford tonight."

"You will send me word?" Desmond asked.

"I shall bring it, sir."

Sarah walked to the door with Sheldon. She seemed reluctant to have him go, as if she drew confidence from his presence. He felt that her hand, laid suddenly on his arm, was holding him back.

"My uncle is a proud man," she said gently.

He turned his hat slowly with impatient fingers. "Yes," he said absently, "he is. But pride won't do him much good now. We've got to disprove Drinkwater's statement."

For a moment, she looked straight into his eyes. "I know you will help us." It annoyed him that he could feel a hot flush creep up his cheeks. In her look and parted lips he sensed a frightened appeal that made her seem to him like a child—a lovely and rather pathetic child—who was baffled by violence and discord.

Jamming his hat on his head, he stepped aside and opened the door. "I will bring you word as soon as possible," he told her, and was gone before she could thank him.

5

THE streets were crowded with patriot soldiers. Howe's North Carolina regulars and the Fincastle Company of riflemen had swelled the provincial forces to five corps. Led by sergeants, companies were still being billeted on Main and Church and Talbot Streets, in the houses that had been deserted at the first rumor of Woodford's approach. The atmosphere was thick with confusion and impending trouble. Sheldon felt it instinctively, though his thoughts were busy with the unhappy plight of the Desmonds. He was glad that their house was at the far end of Church Street. The men who were drunk—and there were plenty of them—were the only ones who might do any real damage, and it was unlikely they would stagger that far.

He wished he could understand the effect that Sarah had on him. A short while ago he would have let her come into his arms, as she obviously wanted to do, if he had not caught himself and gone from the house. She was not meant to fight against times like these. Evelyn would face them with that hard, protective shell behind which she cast her emotions and her desires; she could stand like a slender pillar of strength against the most violent of storm winds, indomitable in her convictions, deliberately seeking the way she would go. Sarah's protection would be arms, strong like his, in which the full, soft beauty of her body would take strength. She could not stand alone, but she would stand with the man of her choosing.

He felt a sudden desire spring out of this knowledge, as involuntary as a tree's bending to a high wind. It throbbed in his veins, and yet he did not love Sarah as he loved Evelyn. He continued to puzzle it out, rubbing his chin reflectively.

Someone hailed him from the bottom of Bank Street. He looked up and saw Lieutenant Travis galloping toward him on a big chestnut horse. Both horse and man breathed clouds of fog into the icy air. Sheldon saluted, as Travis drew up beside him.

"You're wanted at headquarters. I'm off to Williamsburg with the

Colonel's dispatch. I think there's a captaincy in it for you."

"More likely for you, sir," Sheldon replied, but his excitement mounted with every step he took toward the abandoned Tory house that was headquarters. He was just about to pass the sentry at the door when a musket ball, whizzing past his ear, lodged in the jamb. He spun round and saw men running in all directions. The sentry yelled, "Come inside, sir. 'Tis them bloody Tories, burn their arses!"

"Where did it come from?" Sheldon asked, searching the street and the windows of the houses. A cobweb of smoke was drifting slowly upward in the vicinity of Bull's Head Tavern. In a few moments, he saw that the fire had not been without effect. The men were clustering in three groups in different parts of the street. Shouts and curses rang out from husky throats as various detachments headed toward the houses. Finally, gaps opened in the groups and a figure was borne from the center of each one.

When Sheldon reported to Woodford, he found him standing at a window in the dark walnut-paneled room that served as his office. "These people are bitter enemies," he said in a grim, clipped voice. "Every last one of them, and they deserve no favor. It's ridiculous to talk of leniency. As long as they have arms they will use them against us."

"Not all the Tories, sir," Sheldon replied quickly.

Woodford swung around to face him with blazing eyes. "You are defending them, Lieutenant?"

Sheldon felt his blood begin to chill. It was going to be damned near impossible, now, to plead the Desmonds' case, but it had to be done, and done at once.

"I'll round them all up!" Woodford cried, "handcuff them to the negroes and march them to Williamsburg like the cattle they are! They deserve no sympathy and they will have none. If I had my way I'd burn the town around their ears!"

As Sheldon listened to the violent words, his apprehension increased beyond any hope that Woodford would even hear him out. He was silent until the Colonel had returned to his desk, and had lit the candles in a silver-branched girandole standing among piles of dispatches.

"When you sent for me, sir, I was on my way here to request a few moments of your time. There is a matter on which I wish to speak

with you. I think it's important."

"I will be glad to hear what you have to say, Lieutenant."

Sheldon's skeptical smile caught Woodford's attention. "Will it make your task any easier if I tell you that you wish to speak to me of Mr. Christopher Desmond?" he asked.

Then he rose and walked around his desk. He was half a head shorter than Sheldon but he put his arm around the boy's shoulder and drew him toward a chair beside his own. "Sit there," he said kindly.

Stunned by Woodford's words, Sheldon obeyed, mechanically. There was nothing stern in the Colonel's gray eyes now, and when he he spoke his voice had a tired and rather gentle quality. "You recall the wounded Tory who gave me the information about the three Norfolk gentlemen who took food to the British ships?"

Sheldon tightened his jaw and folded his hands stiffly on his knees.

"You neglected to remind me of those names, but memory does not fail me so easily. I remembered them. They were investigated this morning, and I discovered that of the three, one has a very charming niece. Of course, this meant nothing on the face of it, but having recommended you for a promotion to the rank of captain I was eager to relieve my mind of the suspicions which were naturally aroused. I had another conversation with Drinkwater, who, by the way, seems to be improving, and I found that your association with Miss Desmond goes back some time."

"Is that how he described it, sir? My association with Miss Desmond?"

"He implied that you and he were rivals for Miss Desmond's hand and that your attentions were more welcome than his." Woodford cocked an eyebrow in evident amusement.

But if Woodford was amused, Sheldon was not. "Will you allow me to explain it, sir?"

The Colonel nodded.

"I am no suitor for Miss Desmond's hand. I never have been. But I am proud to be her friend and her uncle's as well. And I can tell you, sir, that Mr. Desmond has little regard for Lord Dunmore, and had no part in the activities which Drinkwater described."

"How do you know that?" Woodford demanded.

"I have just come from his house, sir."

Woodford's lips shaped an "oh," but he merely nodded.

Sheldon hurried on, fearful of being stopped in the midst of his explanation. "I did not, and could not believe that Mr. Desmond would have risked his niece's safety by openly serving the Governor, and he confirmed my belief. He told me that he positively refused to send food to the ships, and I believe him."

Woodford frowned. "I do not put such trust in any Tory, Lieutenant."

"But I tell you, sir, he is innocent. I would swear to it, and I only beg you to let them leave Norfolk peaceably and return to Hanover, where you will find Mr. Desmond's record one of political inactivity."

The Colonel's expression did not alter, and his voice was toneless when he replied, "If, as you say, Desmond is innocent, he will be able to prove it before the Committee. I cannot take it into my hands to pass him freely to Hanover. My orders come from the Committee of Safety, and they most definitely direct me to send to Williamsburg for trial any Tories known to have borne arms for the Governor, or for that matter, to have assisted him in any other way. I interpret as assistance, the sending of food to Dunmore's ships. In spite of what you say, Lieutenant, Mr. Desmond is under suspicion of sending provisions, and will go to Williamsburg with the rest of them. I can only add how much I regret, on your account, that I have to do it." Turning back to his desk with a gesture of dismissal, he added, "There are far worse experiences than being tried by the Committee. I think, before long, Mr. Desmond will be glad to be in Williamsburg."

Shelton saluted without replying, and when Woodford bent his head to the papers before him, he left the room. While the Colonel had been speaking a plan had occurred to Sheldon. On the way back to the stables to find Lacey, he kept thinking about it, trying to work out details in desperate haste. They couldn't send Mr. Desmond to Williamsburg, handcuffed to a negro prisoner as they had sent other Tory prisoners. Such discomfort and humiliation were unwarranted. Sarah Desmond would not let her uncle go alone, and it was fantastic to conceive of her traveling to Williamsburg under such conditions. He had hoped for more justice from Colonel Woodford.

Excitement over the shooting had died down, but methodical search for the Tories who had fired the shots continued from house to

house, and the men marched warily through the streets. The Committee had responded to Woodford's request by sending several companies of the first regiment under Major Eppes, but Will's company, he heard, was at Hampton. If Will were here, he kept thinking to himself, I could send him—I could trust him.

He saw Ensign Holmes emerge from one of the houses and hailed him. The young officer touched his hat and approached Sheldon with angry brown eyes, his full, boyish mouth grimly set.

"Have you caught any of them?" Sheldon asked.

"No, sir. Not a trace of them. They're protected, and the only way to get 'em out is to burn 'em out, I reckon." Something seemed to strike him funny and he grinned. "We got a big one, though, sir. Colonel Willoughby's been taken. He says he only took Dunmore's oath under compulsion and they gave him his parole. But we've got him in case Dunmore would like to exchange Colonel Lawson."

"That's good news." Sheldon thanked him and put spurs to Nero. At the stable attached to the L-shaped white frame house which served as quarters for the officers of Captain Meade's company, Sheldon found Lacey cleaning caked mud from Princess's hooves.

"Looka dis, Mars Sheldon," he complained. "No wonda she was limpin'. Dis ain't no kinda life fer a fine hoss lak Princess. She's gittin' right mean, too. Tried ter kick me, then tried ter nudge at me like she want fer 'polergize."

Sheldon examined the hard frogs. "They ought to be packed with wet clay, Lacey."

Lacey grumbled. "'Taint no place fer a hoss lak Princess."

"I know." Sheldon let the hoof down gently and patted the mare's flank. "Anyhow, I want you to saddle her and follow me. Right away."

Lacey looked at him beneath scowling brows. "Yassuh."

When they arrived at Christopher Desmond's house, Sheldon sent Lacey around to the stable yard and told him to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut. "Pretend you can't talk," Sheldon ordered. "In a little while it will be dark and no one will see you."

Waiting for the front door to open, he looked anxiously about him. If word reached Colonel Woodford that he had come back to Desmond's, he'd be marched off to Williamsburg chained to a nigger, himself. It would be mighty hard to justify his presence here a second

time. It seemed an eternity before he was let into the house, though Sarah, seeing him through the window, had sent Jonas flying to the door and was there herself to meet him.

"Tell me what happened!" she cried, before he could remove his cloak.

"Where is your uncle? I must speak to you together." Sheldon saw her stiffen.

"He is with the doctor in Captain Fortescue's room. They are trying to persuade the Captain not to leave the house. He is so ill, and yet he fears that his presence here will bring trouble on us." She paused, and seemed to debate a question before putting it to him cautiously. "He is young, my uncle says, but his face is so drawn with pain, I declare he looks a hundred. It is out of the question for him to go and perhaps, if you wouldn't mind speaking to him, you could convince him that he will do us no harm."

Sheldon smiled at her persuasive concern. "I am afraid the sight of one of Colonel Woodford's men would be something of a shock for him. Anyhow, I must speak to you and your uncle, alone, first."

Christopher Desmond listened to Sheldon's plan with mouth agape. "You would do this for us?" he asked, astounded.

"I would do it, because I cannot bear injustice. Good Lord, sir, it's the very thing we claim to be fighting. If I didn't believe in your innocence I wouldn't lift a hand to help you. And," he added with a hard smile, "I expect your gentleman's word that you won't become an enemy of the Colony when you are free."

"I shall be too concerned with preserving my freedom," Desmond answered.

Sheldon hurried on. "I don't think anyone will ever know how you left Norfolk if you succeed in passing our guard, unless my horses are recognized. And now, sir, there is little time to lose. As soon as it is dark—"

"My dear boy"—Desmond smiled wearily, pulling himself with an effort from his chair and moving to Sarah's side—"you will forgive me for letting you outline your plan for our escape but I have no intention of leaving Norfolk. The temptation to imagine a way out of this predicament was too great to resist."

"But you *must* go!" Sheldon cried. "Our men are rabid against

the Tories. It's all we can do to keep them from hanging every one who dares to put his head out of doors."

Desmond shook his head stubbornly. "I have never had much interest in political affairs, Sheldon, but when this trouble began my first thought was that the Virginians had seized upon every folly of an unwise governor as an excuse for unruly behavior. I didn't feel that there was principle or discretion or vision behind their demands. Unless your standards are remarkably singular, you have given me hope, for the first time, that reason and justice will eventually arise out of chaos in Virginia. I feel so strongly that this is so, that I prefer to submit myself to an inquiry."

"But Miss Desmond—"

"I'm going to stay with Uncle Chris, no matter what happens," Sarah announced with a finality that left no hope for persuasion.

Suddenly the room seemed to Sheldon a cold and gloomy place. It was square and high-ceiled, with dark walls. At one end an inadequate fire burned feebly. In his excitement a moment ago, he had noticed none of these cheerless details so unlike Desmond's house in Hanover. But now that Desmond had made his decision, Sheldon sank into a chair facing him and Sarah, feeling that something had given way inside him. Nerves that had been tense enough with anxiety to numb all sense of mental or bodily fatigue became prey to a chill that shook him mercilessly from head to toes. Behind tight lips, his teeth chattered till they ached, and a tingling sensation crawling beneath his skin seemed to paralyze his limbs and the muscles of his face.

"Sheldon, you are ill!" Desmond was at his side in an instant, followed by Sarah who knelt beside him and took his icy hands between her own.

He did not answer, but sat with eyes closed, trying to summon strength that would not come. He had to get out of here. If he could only get Lacey—

"You must stay here. I'll have a room prepared for you. Why, you're shaking like a leaf. Sarah, ring for Jonas."

With an effort that made him feel dizzy and nauseated, Sheldon pushed himself forward in his chair. "No, please don't. If you will let me sit here for a moment, I shall be all right. It's the dampness at Great Bridge that has gotten into my bones."

Desmond patted his shoulders. "Of course, you shall sit here as long as you like. I'll get you some hot rum. Jonas mixes an incomparable brew for chills."

Sarah looked long at Sheldon's face. It had gotten so thin since she had first seen him that a gauntness robbed him of the look of youth. The strain and fatigue of work were in the lines etched from his slender nostrils to the corners of his mouth, and in the dark shadows beneath his eyes. Where before, his neatly clubbed reddish-brown hair grew back from sun-burned skin that had the same strong quality of color, winter and the rigors of the campaign had given it the yellowish cast of faded tan. But now his chalky paleness frightened her. When she drew up a chair close beside him and he caught the delicate scent of jasmine, memory sped him back to his mother's quiet, comforting figure as it moved about his room when he was sick.

"Put your hands on my face," he said as naturally as if it were his mother who sat beside him now.

His quiet request, uttered so casually, flooded her with indescribable tenderness. With touch as gentle as summer rain, she pillowed his head in her arm and turned his face against her shoulder.

When Desmond returned, she motioned him to silence. His startled expression caused her no embarrassment. She would have faced all of Virginia like this for the exquisite pleasure of holding Sheldon in her arms.

When he roused himself, the cold, numb feeling in his limbs was gone, but it was several minutes before he could recall how he came to be in Sarah Desmond's arms. When he remembered his request, he scarcely dared look at her. This one evening had undone all the care he had taken to keep the impersonal barrier between them. He could see in the radiance of her face all the passionate longing that, in Evelyn's face, would so easily have set him afire. Slowly he moved his head from her arm and sat up.

"How do you feel, Sheldon?" she asked, the soft speaking of his name for the first time tinging her cheeks with color.

"Much better," he told her more brusquely than he intended. "I think I can go, now."

"Not until you've had your hot rum," she insisted. "It will warm

you against the cold. If we could only persuade you to stay here—”

“That’s very kind of you,” he said, getting hastily to his feet, “but my absence from quarters would cause suspicion which I fear would involve you. I’ll drink the rum and then I must leave at once.”

Sarah called to her uncle who returned in a moment with a pewter jug and two cups. “I feel rather cold myself,” he complained, pouring out the pungent grog. “To your good health and happiness, Sheldon.” Desmond’s eyes twinkled as he lifted his cup. Then they slid mischievously to Sarah. Her color heightened and she gave an angry little shake of her head.

“And yours, sir,” Sheldon returned, keeping his eyes on his cup as he drank, to hide his embarrassment.

6

Two weeks went by before Sheldon was able to take up his duties again. Two weeks during which he neither knew nor cared very much what was happening beyond the pale green walls of his room. Dr. Brown brought him disjointed accounts of salt-laden vessels seized by ships of the United Colonies. He reported the impatience of many of the officers, who were requesting leave of absence or permission to resign; the proposed sale of the enemy’s arms and division of the proceeds among the men; and though Sheldon seemed to listen and thanked the doctor for his information, he fell into a restless sleep soon after Dr. Brown had left and forgot everything he had been told. He was alternately shaken by chills and drenched in the sweat of breaking fever, until the bones in his face protruded like angular ridges and his hip bones felt sharp enough to tear through his taut skin. His dreams carried him from the Kanawha with Clen, to the House of Burgesses, where he stood delivering bitter tirades against Lord Dunmore; then he would wander with Evelyn through the pine forests near Will’s house in Augusta. He never dreamed of Great Bridge, though the face of Captain Fordyce, in other surroundings, haunted him with surprised and terrified glances. When he was able to sit up after ten days, Captain Meade came in to see him and described the court-martial of Lieutenant Boykin who had been arrested for deserting his post at Bachelor’s Mill. The court-martial

was the chief topic of conversation among officers and men, he said, but to Sheldon it simply meant more misery and brought to mind the disquieting thought that for all he knew Christopher Desmond *might* have been tried and convicted while he lay sick in this accursed room. But would they change their minds, try him here, where it was simpler to ascertain all the facts in the case; or wouldn't they more likely drag him to Williamsburg where a mass of papers and prejudiced witnesses would be the testimony on which a verdict was given? Gradually, a gnawing impatience replaced the indifference to events that had been the most important factor in his recovery. He *must* know about Desmond! He must get out of bed, get dressed and find out. While Captain Meade continued with his news, Sheldon threw back the covers and put his feet to the carpeted floor.

"Here, what are you doing?" Meade cried, moving quickly to the side of the bed.

"I've got to get out of here, sir. I can't bear lying here any longer." He rested his hand on the arm Meade extended to restrain him, and made an effort to stand up; but the accumulated weakness of ten days' illness defeated him. Cold sweat coursed in thin streams down his temples. He could feel it tickling his sides as it ran down from his armpits, and then the overpowering dizziness returned, and he sank down again onto the bed.

Meade lifted Sheldon's legs and slid them beneath the covers, then with a tenderness to which his large rough hands seemed unaccustomed, he pulled up the blanket to Sheldon's chin and tucked it underneath his shoulders. Sheldon lay with eyes closed, trying to breathe evenly, to fight off the faintness. It was absurd for him to be weak like this. He was strong, and always had been. He opened his eyes slowly and saw that Meade was still standing beside him and the Captain's full, friendly face wore a deep frown. He began to speak as if he were addressing a child. "Hilliard, you have never shirked your duty when you were fit. We all know that and respect you for it. You have been sick, man, sicker than you realize, and you must have patience until you are well. Where's that servant of yours?"

"At the stable, I reckon," Sheldon replied faintly.

"Well, I'm going to send him in here, if you have no objections, with orders to see that you keep to your bed."

Sheldon smiled and stroked his chin. "I'll have him shave me. Per-

haps that'll bolster my spirits. But don't go just yet, sir. I wanted to ask you if the Tory prisoners have been sent to Williamsburg."

"No. Captain Johnston and Lieutenant Dixon are setting off with them tomorrow or the next day. Colonel Howe, and Woodford, too, think that when the Tories are moved off, Lord Dunmore may again solicit an exchange of prisoners on a more reasonable basis."

"Do they honestly believe Dunmore could do anything reasonable?" Sheldon retorted.

"We can only hope," Meade laughed. "Of course, Colonel Howe wouldn't listen to an exchange of prisoner for prisoner, placing the officers and soldiers of the regulars on a footing with militia and peasant captives."

"Have any of the gentlemen Tories still in Norfolk been passed?" Sheldon pursued, still hopeful of information about the Desmonds.

"A few," Meade told him.

"Was a Tory named Desmond among them, sir?" His pulses began a wild throbbing and he found himself repeating anxiously to himself, say yes, say yes.

But Meade shook his head. "I don't remember the name. I saw the list, but I'm sure that name wasn't on it."

7

ON THE afternoon of New Year's day, Sheldon stood in his buckskins before the window of his room. The view to the Elizabeth River was almost completely obstructed by a mass of trees behind the low-lying warehouses. But he could see the top of a mast and, to his left, the reflection of the cold winter sun on white sails. Lacey reported that a frigate and a storeship had arrived on the twenty-second with the *Otter* and *Kingfisher*, Dunmore's men-of-war that had played such havoc with the coastal towns, and that they were still riding before the town with springs on their cables. The men had been at high nervous tension for days, momentarily expecting bombardment of the town. Dunmore had been threatening such retaliation for a long time, and everyone knew that only the hope of recapturing Norfolk, which would be his greatest vantage point in Virginia, had tempted him to hold his fire.

The town was filled with Tory women and children who had fled from the disease and starvation that were taking a heavy toll of life on Dunmore's ships. With increasing frequency putrid negro bodies, discolored and swollen with the pox, washed up along the shore. There was little objection aboard His Excellency's fleet to the Tory flights which left fewer mouths to feed; but the patriots felt that the pitiable creatures, warmed and fed, required watching, and the men were beginning to doubt the wisdom of Colonel Howe's humane gesture in permitting their return. A guard could ill be spared, with the distillery and the houses on the water-front compelling the heaviest possible defense. The fear of a patriot rout still disturbed headquarters, for it was easy enough to see that if Dunmore succeeded in landing troops below the Virginia guard and in covering their advance with his guns, his complete possession of the water courses would end all hope of a colonial victory.

Howe had called for men and more men to ward off this possibility, and among them, Sheldon had been ordered to take a detachment to the distillery and prevent the landing of troops at any cost. At any cost! He felt a rising surge of fury at what that cost might be, while Dunmore remained untouchable. If the Committee had the brains of a sparrow they'd get a fleet of ships down here, bottle up the British in the river and give them a taste of the colonial lash from land and water.

He picked up his hat and went to the door. Was this damnable feeling of weakness ever going to leave him? If a musket were thrust into his hands, he wouldn't be able to raise it above his waist. As it was, he didn't seem to be too deft with the sword that swung at his side.

He stepped into the street, squinting against the light that hit his eyes like red-hot coals. Lacey was there with Nero who looked a little less like a bedraggled cart horse now that he had a bit of passable fodder in his belly.

"I want you to come down after me and bring Nero back," Sheldon ordered. "I'll tie him behind the distillery."

"Yassuh. I won't fergit." It was at the very moment Lacey spoke that they heard the rattle of drums from the direction of the river, followed by the deafening roar of guns.

"Give me a leg up, quick," Sheldon cried. He felt none too steady

in the saddle, but he put heel to Nero and bent to a hard gallop.

Everywhere along Main Street, into which he had turned, frightened inhabitants were struggling with carriages, wagons, gigs, carts—any conveyance they could find to carry their belongings. A tangle of wheels and horses in the narrow streets and winding lanes that curled away from them, added to the confusion of men hastening to the water-front with any assortment of arms and clubs they could lay hands on. And all the while, the steady boom of cannon roared like summer thunder over the town.

As Sheldon approached the distillery, yellow clouds of sulphurous smoke began drifting toward shore. Even the wind favored the British, he observed bitterly. He found his detachment taking orders from Ensign Nicholas. The defense was made up, for the most part, of Culpepper Minute-men, who, along with the rest of the body, were under the command of Colonel Stevens. Already, it looked as if a firm stand were impossible. Men were firing as rapidly as they could load and prime their muskets, but the cannonade from the warships was forcing them to retire. When Sheldon took over his command, he saw that it was useless to order the men to stand their ground. Behind their own fire, several boatloads of British were rowing toward the wharves. Let them land and see how far they'd get! No doubt they hadn't forgotten the Culpepper sharp-shooters who, under cover of the warehouses and buildings on the water-front, had picked off the owner of every head that showed itself aboard Dunmore's vessels. At closer range there'd be a slaughter. Behind the warehouses in Main Street Sheldon gathered his detachment, ordered the men to test the set-screws securing their flints, and to make sure that the priming hadn't sifted out of the pans. There might be a wait of several minutes before the redcoats showed themselves and he wanted to calm frayed nerves. Almost in a direct line with him, the Culpepper men had taken up their positions. Beyond that, he knew, practically all of the patriots were defending the long line before the town, though it would have taken five thousand to do the job properly.

It looked now, though, as if the bloody-backs had other ideas in mind than trying to run the patriot gauntlet. Suddenly a spiral of greyish-brown smoke rose on the afternoon air, and one after another of the warehouses leapt into flame.

"Well, damn my ugly eyes, if them dirty swine ain't tryin' to burn us out like rats!" a private of the militia at Sheldon's elbow cursed.

"Look!" yelled another. "They're tryin' to land more men."

Sheldon had already seen the boats breaking water for shore. Motioning his detachment to follow him, he raced for the wharf. Fanned by a northeasterly wind, flames reached out with yellow, avid fingers until it looked as if the houses along the water-front were one gigantic bonfire. The air that had been biting cold but a short while before was hot now and laden with the acrid smell of smoke. To left and right of the pressing provincials the crash of falling timbers and the collapsing walls of the warehouses ended in an eruption of sparks, and then the jets of flame reached up again through clouds of smoke.

Sweat and ashes and dirt coated the men's faces until their eyes seemed to peer out of holes in dark gray masks. At the wharf Sheldon halted. They had arrived none too soon, for the first boatload of redcoats were scrambling onto the landing.

The heavy breathing of his men, forming in a line behind him, came to Sheldon strangely like the sighing of pines. His own breath nearly choked him as he rapped out the order to take aim. Muskets and rifles were raised to shoulders lumpy with tensed muscles. Sharp eyes traveled down long barrels to front sights. "Fire!"

Simultaneously, the British had formed in two short lines, the first kneeling, the second standing, but they fired just that second later than the provincials which gave Sheldon's detachment the edge. Priming and loading their muskets, they moved forward under the scorching heat of the flames, with the screams and groans of the wounded, the roar of cannon, the crashing of cannon-balls and the crackling of flames making a wild and terrifying accompaniment to their advance.

Sheldon seized the firelock of a fallen militiaman, hastily primed and loaded it and discharged it at the crossbelt of a young Captain in a bearskin shako. The redcoat sagged like a loose sack of meal, and down his hands which were clutching at his stomach a red stream began to run. The men behind him were falling back, dragging the wounded with them.

"Hold your fire, boys," Sheldon yelled. "Looks like they've had enough."

The detachment watched the redcoats falling over one another to get back to their boat. Some of the shirtmen began to laugh. In the lurid light of the fire, boats could be seen pulling out all along the line of the wharves. Then, as they approached the ships, the cannon roared into activity with increased fury, forcing the patriots to retreat again behind the warehouses.

When they had converged on Main Street in scattered detachments, there was great speculation as to whether or not the British would make another attempt to land. Only one house now remained standing on the water-front. The fire, blown by the wind with alarming rapidity toward the town, made a quick decision imperative. Colonel Stevens posted a guard from the Culpepper company in the solitary house on the wharf. The rest of the men were ordered to find cover where possible, but to remain in the vicinity of the water-front to repel any further attempt to land.

It was not long before attempts were made at three points along the shore. This time there was no delay in the reception given the redcoats. Rifles rang out from the solitary house in concert with the report of firelocks from shore. An officer toppled headlong into one of the boats; from the other two came prolonged shrieks of agony before the British, not having put a foot on shore, withdrew with a wild splashing of oars.

Six times during the evening the patriots blasted them back into the river without the loss of a man, while Sheldon counted fifteen wounded in the boats which his own detachment had repulsed before they were relieved. Drawing off his weary men, who shuffled up toward Church Street more dead than alive, faces blackened by powder and shoulders and jaws bruised by the repeated kick of heavy stocks, he felt that one of his ambitions had finally been achieved. Dunmore had virtually been driven from the shores of Virginia—perhaps temporarily—but at least where he and his men had fought, Dunmore had failed. Norfolk would never again give cover to this scoundrel, which was some compensation for the fact that the greatest trading center in Virginia was crashing about their heads in a shower of sparks and flying embers. The men seemed too tired to pay much attention to the inferno of noise and destruction, or even to the terrified cries of the people farther along the path of the fire who had backed everything on wheels up to their houses and were filling

them with their belongings.

Sheldon pushed his way through the crowd to the square frame house where he was billeted and which, by now, meant only one thing to him—sleep. Sleep, even if the house burned around his head.

Before dawn a violent crash that shook the walls of his room and the heavy four-poster bed in which he lay brought Sheldon to his feet with a wild thumping of his heart. Had the British finally managed to land? Had they planted their cannon in the very heart of the town? He threw on his clothes and reached for the doorknob just as Lacey, wide-eyed and trembling, opened the door from the other side.

“Mars Sheldon, you better git out o’ here!” he yelled. “De British, dey’s shootin’ right into de middle ob town an’ de fire’s comin’ up heah fas’ as a scalded cat. All de women folks is runnin’ right through de shot, wif babies in der ahms, an’ our own sojers dey’s burnin’ down every house dey sees, fo’ Gawd.”

Sheldon pushed Lacey before him and rushed into the street. What he had said was true. The patriots, like a band of demented banshees with flaming torches in hand, were running in and out of the houses, and no sooner did they come out of the doorways than the interiors lit up with an ominous red glow, then seemed to explode into flame.

“Come on!” Sheldon cried. “I’m going to the Desmonds’.”

“Lord mercy!” Lacey wailed. “Dey’ll kill us all.” But Sheldon was running as fast as he could toward Church Street, his way lighted by the glow of fires on every side. What he saw when he reached the Desmonds’ house sent the blood pounding to his head. Through the roof and upper stories smoke poured, shot through with tenuous flames. As a gust of wind momentarily cleared the smoke, the interiors of the rooms were visible, polished wood hastening its own destruction, crumbling inward in a shower of sparks. In the copper glow of the fire the faces of a hundred or more men who would claim to be patriots, some laughing, some jeering, all sweating in the heat, made a scene like a crazy dream of purgatory. Many along the fringes of the crowd seemed at first to be as horrified as Sheldon. Then, gradually, they, too, caught the wild fever. Sheldon tried to force his way forward but strong arms and unyielding bodies held fast against him. A towering young patriot, face blackened by soot half turned to demand,

"Where you goin', mister?" and before Sheldon could speak, turned again to bar his way.

Only over the heads of the crowd could Sheldon see what was happening. Lacey, at his shoulder, watched dumbly. Men in shirt sleeves were rolling out casks of wine and carrying silver candelabra, bowls and trays. Some carried flat silver clenched in dirty fists. One came out with a lace table cloth slung over his shoulder.

The fire had spread to the lower floor when Sheldon saw the sight he had most feared. Pulled and pushed in turn, by the power-drunk patriots, Sarah and Desmond were flung from the door to the crowd whose cries, as the two figures sprawled in the street, drowned the crackling of the fire and the sound of collapsing walls.

"Kill them bloody Tories!"

Sheldon threw his weight against the men before him, and a pointed elbow caught him sharply in the stomach. He gave a short gasp, bent to ease the pain, then straightened, at the same time hurling his fist with all his strength against the man's chin. The man collapsed heavily, leaving a gap through which Sheldon stepped quickly. Angry faces turned, hardened bodies blocked his way. He cupped his hands around his mouth.

"I am one of Woodford's men! Let me through!"

His voice was drowned by laughter. "Tell Woodford we've got him a prize!" someone yelled:

There was no arguing with this crowd, he realized. He began to back out, beating his way to the open area before the burning house. Once he got to Sarah and her father, he'd shoot the first man who came near him. Suddenly, he thought of the British Captain, Fortescue, and a sickening chill sped through his body.

Someone spun him round. He looked into the eyes of the young man who had asked him where he was going, and who now said, "You're makin' a lot o' trouble for one o' Woodford's men."

There was an electric silence before Sheldon said, "Colonel Woodford would not be very pleased to hear that the patriots he has been defending are a pack of murdering vandals."

He saw the young man stiffen and then from somewhere behind him came the blow that paralyzed every nerve in his body as he sagged slowly to the ground.

It was well after midnight when Sheldon, waking up in his own bed, pressed his throbbing head between his hands and tried to piece together the terrible scene at the Desmonds'. Lacey's disjointed account of what had happened after his master had been knocked unconscious made Sheldon feel violently sick at his stomach. The patriots were pulling Sarah and her uncle down the street toward the jail when Lacey, taking advantage of the rapidly dispersing crowd, dragged Sheldon to the doorway of an adjacent house. There he waited, squatting beside his master, until a militiaman, singing at the top of his lungs, paused to investigate the huddled form at Lacey's feet. Together he and Lacey had carried Sheldon back to his quarters.

Sheldon kept his face in his hands as he listened to his slave's account. When Lacey had finished speaking, he raised his head.

"Bring me my clothes."

Lacey's frown was heavy with protest. "You ain't goin' out, Mars Sheldon? Not wid yer haid busted."

"It isn't busted, Lacey. Dq as I say, quickly."

Lacey stood his ground. "Bettah stay in bed, Mars Sheldon."

"God damn it, Lacey, bring me my clothes!" Sheldon yelled, then pressed his head between his flattened palms. Hot, stabbing pains were shooting through his temples. Presently, he added, more calmly, "I can't rest as long as the Desmonds are in the hands of that pack of wild dogs. I'm going to headquarters to see Colonel Woodford."

Headquarters had escaped the flames. When Sheldon was let into the Colonel's room, he saw in Woodford's face no evidence of the fury he had expected. Was it possible, he wondered, growing cold at the thought, that his commanding officer approved of all this plundering and burning and abuse of the people? And then he realized that Woodford was not alone. Sitting at the window, half hidden by the damask draperies, Francis Foutré was watching the spectacle with indifferent gaze. Sheldon stared at him for fully a minute—mouth, eyes and eyebrows set in grim horizontal lines—before Foutré turned his head, nodded slightly and said, "Good morning, Lieutenant."

Sheldon returned his nod without replying. Confusion and suspicion were in his voice when he addressed Woodford. "Have our men been burning the town and attacking the civilians on the orders of Colonel

Howe, sir?" he asked.

Woodford rested his head on the back of his chair and fixed Sheldon with bloodshot eyes. "Not precisely on orders."

"I don't understand, sir." Two crimson spots burned in Sheldon's cheeks.

"You don't have to." Woodford smiled. "We are hoping, as Dunmore once said, to lay the town in ashes."

"But what of the people?"

"Mr. Foutré brings me information that all of the people who did not perish in the fire at the beginning, are out of danger. Isn't that so?" He turned to Foutré for confirmation.

Before Foutré could answer, Sheldon cut in, "May I ask, sir, if Mr. Foutré is in charge of the evacuation?"

"He is not," Woodford returned, glowering indignantly at the thinly veiled sarcasm. "But the Sons of Liberty know the people of Norfolk better than either Colonel Howe or myself, and Mr. Foutré is a leader in that society. To whom could we look for more accurate information!"

Sheldon did not alter his tone, nor did his anger subside. Whatever they did to him, he was going to speak his mind. "Perhaps, then, Mr. Foutré can explain why our own men went to the house of Mr. Christopher Desmond, stole his silver, dragged him and his niece into the street and burned the house without right or provocation, or due respect for their safety!"

Foutré jumped to his feet, and in three strides was across the room and facing Sheldon. His voice had a razor edge. "I'll gladly take the responsibility for that! Desmond is a rank traitor to the cause of liberty. Provisions, which the patriots could well use, he has sent to the Tories aboard Dunmore's ships, and he has dared up to this very day, to harbor a British officer in his house."

"You seem sure of your facts," Sheldon retorted, without any effort to keep animosity out of his tone.

The muscles in Foutré's jaws tightened into hard knots. "The Sons of Liberty make it their business to know these things."

"Then," Sheldon replied coldly, "you should also know that Mr. Desmond refused to join in giving aid to the British, though it was strongly solicited by Mr. Norris and Mr. Speddin, and that the officer whom you say he harbored is Captain Fortescue, an old friend, who

was wounded at Great Bridge and asked to be carried to his house. Would you, sir, under such circumstances have refused to take him in?"

"Evidently you know Mr. Desmond well," Foutré replied, "and admire his sentiments."

"I have known Mr. Desmond for several years, though I regret to say, not very well. He has never made any secret of his Loyalism, but neither have many of the Tories who have been passed through our lines. Justice and decency have stopped at Mr. Desmond's door, and if the responsibility is yours, sir, I should like to know the reason!"

Woodford raised his hand in weary impatience. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, please."

The two men drew apart at his command, then Foutré spoke, excitement exposing his origin in the French inflection of his voice. "If you do not require me any longer, sir, I would beg leave to withdraw."

"Yes, yes, you may leave," Woodford said irritably. "I'll send for you when I want you."

When Foutré had gone, Woodford lost little time voicing his displeasure. "It's not your place, Lieutenant, to question the behavior of our troops. If they are not acting under orders, they are acting in the interest of the Colony. I must say that your concern over this Tory, Desmond, ill becomes an officer in the army of Virginia. What makes you think that we should accept Desmond's word for his innocence rather than Foutré's that he is guilty?"

"Foutré is judging him on circumstantial evidence, sir. Mr. Desmond made no effort to escape from Norfolk. He is eager to clear himself by trial. His chief concern all along has been for his niece's safety, but he was not even spared the pain and humiliation of seeing her dragged from his house by drunken men. That is what I protest against, sir, and I will resign my commission before I will serve in an army that permits such an assault upon decent people."

"Desmond will have his trial," Woodford replied stonily. "But if, in the meantime, you do not approve of our methods, I am sure the Committee will accept your resignation. However, I would remind you that it is four o'clock in the morning, you have had practically no rest after your illness and you are unusually upset." His voice and

his expression as they softened betrayed his own fatigue. "My adjutant is not occupying his room. You are welcome to it if you will take my advice and rest for a while."

Sheldon felt his throat constricting with weakness and the futility of protest. He swallowed a hard lump and asked a question. "Do you know where the Desmonds are, sir?"

"Captain Johnston and Lieutenant Dixon are setting off for Williamsburg with the Tory prisoners tomorrow." Woodford raised himself from his chair and walked to the door with Sheldon. The hand that he laid on the young man's arm was firm and reassuring, matching the tone of his voice, but what he said before he waved Sheldon down the hall to Bullit's room aroused the young man's hatred of Foutré to a new pitch. "Mr. Foutré told me that you paid a second visit to Mr. Desmond, and that you had two horses with you. If his inference is correct, I am inclined to share your belief in Desmond's innocence. At the same time, I think you endangered your own position. If I weren't already convinced that your desire for justice in this particular case drove you to such a risk, my suspicions of you would leave me only one course. But we will forget that, and remember only the gallant part you played at Great Bridge."

8

WHEN Sheldon's company returned to Williamsburg, they left behind them the smoldering ruins of the greatest shipping town in the Colony. Norfolk, caught between the two stools of the Revolution, had paid for its dualism with its life-blood.

Sheldon went straight to The Grove when he heard that Carter Braxton was staying with the Burwells. The weather was still severe, a whipping, icy wind howling in off the James when he and Lacey rode up to the stone steps before the river door. He walked up the steps and turned around to face the long gray strip of the James beyond the terraced lawn. Much had happened since he had stood here the last time on a clear spring day looking across the river to Hog Island. He and Lewis had talked about an expedition to the Island, and now Lewis was a Burgess, and there would be no expedition for any of them unless there was more fighting to be done.

When he was let into the great hall the sound of familiar voices came clearly to him.

"Do I hear Mr. Burwell's voice, Otis?" he asked the servant who had answered the door.

"Yassuh, yo' does. Go right in, suh."

From the drawing-room, Nathaniel Burwell came forward to meet him. There was an expression of such genuine delight on his face that Sheldon thought, what an art it is to make any friend feel so welcome.

"Gad, but I'm glad to see you!" Burwell cried. "Do you know how long it's been since you last put foot in this house?"

"A good many months, sir. Mrs. Burwell is well?" he inquired, though he knew if she were not, Nathaniel's face would be as long as a winter night.

"Yes, thank God. In spite of the beastly cold. All that frets her is that precious box we planted last time you were here." Nathaniel took Sheldon's arm and led him toward the drawing-room. "Some friends of yours are here, and we'd all give a deal to hear about Great Bridge and Norfolk. I envied you the chance to fight. Colonel Henry was in Hampton in December, but for the most part they've tied him up. But we'll talk about that later."

On the threshold, Sheldon stopped abruptly. Seated on a sofa, warming his hands at the fireplace, was Colonel Corbin. Here was a meeting that he did not relish; one that he would not have believed could occur in Nathaniel Burwell's house. He scarcely saw Carter Braxton rise from the same sofa, or heard the surprised, cordial greeting of Tom Nelson. Stiffly he moved forward, with the urgent pressure of Nathaniel's arm making retreat impossible.

His discomfiture was not lost upon Corbin, who rose to his feet and extended his hand in a gesture of spontaneous friendliness. Awkwardly, Sheldon took the proffered hand, but he turned away rather eagerly to Braxton, who took his arms in a firm grip and stood him off to look at him. The Colonel's looking old, he thought at the moment Braxton cried delightedly, "The army's done you good, Sheldon. You've gotten lean and strong as a ramrod. Or is all this leanness due to the scarcity of proper food Colonel Woodford's been complaining of since Great Bridge?" There was a good-humored twinkle in his blue eyes.

"He looks right tired to me," Nelson observed. "Why don't you give the boy a chair, Nathaniel?"

"I'm going to give him more than a chair," Nathaniel returned. "A sample from the punch bowl is what he needs!"

He poured a cupful of arrack punch from the silver bowl on a table by the window, handed it to him, then led him to the sofa opposite Corbin. Sheldon drained the cup in three gulps. It was so long since he had tasted anything but rum and cheap whiskey that he'd forgotten how potent good arrack punch could be until a slow delicious fire began to drive away fatigue and embarrassment. Nathaniel refilled his cup, and the men gathered round him. He felt that they were waiting to hear what he had to say, as if the *Virginia Gazette* and Woodford's and Howe's own dispatches hadn't given them more news than he could tell. But as he sipped his second cup of punch, he began to speak. First, he must allay his discomfort at this unexpected meeting with Corbin. It was ridiculous for him not to feel at ease when Corbin was making every effort to show that he harbored no ill-feeling for the Laneville affair. Sheldon felt suddenly that there was no time better than the present to clear up any misunderstanding which might still lurk in Corbin's private attitude toward him. Turning the cup in his hands he said, "Colonel Corbin, you are a magnanimous man if you have forgiven me for my part in the militia's march on Laneville."

Corbin waved the observation aside. "I would be foolish indeed to hold you responsible for the orders of your superiors. We are all trying to do our duties, Sheldon, and if yours are opposed to mine, it is the fault of the times we live in." He sighed softly. "I performed a duty in January which I had hoped might conceivably unite patriots and Loyalists."

Sheldon had a sudden stimulating impression that these men would understand what he had come to say. But for the present he contented himself with asking, "Was the nature of your duty a secret, Colonel? I confess it has aroused my curiosity."

"No. It is not private," Corbin replied. "The nature of it brought me here at a time when the visit of a Tory might have caused Nathaniel considerable embarrassment." He addressed these words to Burwell who protested that Corbin would be welcome under any circumstances. "It was at the end of January that the Governor sent

for me aboard the *Dunmore*. He had a scheme whereby I was to use my efforts toward a conciliation. I went to the interview with the consent of the Convention, but, of course, when it came to the primary issues, Lord Dunmore wouldn't concede an inch. I might say I had hoped he would see that there would be more honor than dishonor in a compromise, but he is a stubborn man. I feel now that I have done everything I can in the way of intervention. Nathaniel bears me that assurance from the House, so I am returning to Laneville to grow old as peacefully as I can."

Sheldon forbore with difficulty expressing his opinion of Lord Dunmore. He would respect Colonel Corbin's sentiments as Corbin had respected his.

When he began to speak it was with a growing sense of confidence that he might unite the sympathies of the Tories and patriots in this room on the matter which so deeply concerned him. The feeling of intimacy created by warm, polished pine in the glow of the fire and the languid postures of his listeners made it easy for him to think aloud; to sketch rapidly, from the beginning, his association with Christopher Desmond, and finally the meeting at Norfolk. He went on from there more leisurely, letting his story deviate to give these friends an understanding of the principle which motivated his thoughts and his actions in this Tory case.

"Justice is the firebrand that has been tossed amongst us," he reminded them. "Without the strength of that principle, Patrick Henry could have shouted his lungs out at St. John's without making the slightest impression on the Colony. He was demanding the one thing that touched us all. If then, our courts of inquiry deal out injustice, would it not be twice as reprehensible as it has been at the hands of the British ministry?"

"Where do you feel that injustice has been done?" Tom Nelson questioned.

"At Norfolk, sir. I can understand the order to burn the town to the ground, and in some cases, the treatment of the Tory prisoners. There were many among them who deserved no leniency, and believe me, they got none." A half-smile twisted his broad mouth. "They caught one of them returning from the *Otter*, dragged him back to his house and held him there to watch while the troops rifled it of furniture and set fire to it. But they did the same thing to Christopher

Desmond and his niece. And their evidence of his guilt was the word of a rejected suitor of Miss Desmond's who was suffering from shock, and of Francis Foutré who is fanatical in his hatred of all Tories, be they babes in arms or grown men."

"What was the accusation?" Nathaniel asked.

Quickly Sheldon searched the faces of the four men. In all but Corbin's there was hesitancy, doubt, suspicion. Their expressions angered him. Did they think he had any reason to defend Desmond other than his desire to see the principle on which they had been dragged into war upheld? What had he to gain by Desmond's freedom? He answered Nathaniel's question in a rising tone, feeling himself almost at bay. "He was charged with having sent food to Dunmore's ships, and with harboring a British officer." With a resentful sense of futility he gave them Desmond's explanation. "I came here for a purpose," he confessed in conclusion. "I don't know which members of the Committee of Safety will comprise the court of inquiry when Desmond's case is tried, but I should like to see him absolved of guilt as he deserves to be."

Braxton blew out a deep breath. Would this impulsive young friend of his never learn discretion? His interest in this case would require more explanation than he had thus far conceived. He realized suddenly that Sheldon was addressing him pointedly, anxiously.

"I came here, Colonel Braxton, to ask you to intercede in their behalf, because I was so certain you would be willing to accept my word in this one case. You know, sir," he added, pleading with Nelson, now, "that Mr. Desmond was politically inactive."

Slowly, Nelson shook his head. "You can't judge people's war-time activities by their peace-time manner of living."

The flicker of a smile crossed Sheldon's lips as he looked from one to another of his listeners. "I see that it is useless to argue."

There was an interval of thoughtful silence, before Tom Nelson cleared his throat and spoke in an effort to change the subject. "Before you came in we were discussing the possibility of a declaration of independence."

Sheldon moved to the edge of the sofa. Surprise and pleasure were written in his face. "We were allowed no papers," he explained. "I didn't know the Congress was contemplating so definite a break."

"Not the Congress," Braxton pointed out. "That is, not yet. Tom

feels that we will be instructed to propose the declaration in Congress."

"Are you a delegate to the Congress, sir?" Sheldon asked in a tone of voice sufficiently incredulous to bring a faint tinge of color to Braxton's cheeks.

"Perhaps you do not know that Mr. Randolph died in Philadelphia last October. I was delegated in his place."

Peyton Randolph dead! Sheldon sank back slowly against the sofa. Why, he was almost synonymous with Virginia. Speaker Randolph had moulded conservative thought with as sure and wise a hand as Patrick Henry had championed the radical. He began to realize quite clearly how important that conservative mind of Randolph's had been. It was he who had said that justice must prevail on our side as surely as we expect it of the Ministry.

"I did not know," Sheldon replied quietly. "The blow must have been great to you, sir, for it is a shock to me and I did not know him very well."

There was a long silence among the men before Nathaniel, bringing the conversation back to the subject of independence, declared, "If we are to sever our ties with Great Britain, it will be a fight, and Virginia and New England will have to lead it."

"I am not convinced we are ready for independence," Braxton asserted. "It seems to me too risky a thing to throw off our connection with Great Britain and give ourselves up to the arms of France."

"I don't agree," Nelson broke in. "In my opinion, independence is our only hope of existence. I believe this despite the fact that no man on this continent will sacrifice more than I will by the separation."

"If independence is the only solution, I, too, am for it," Braxton said imperturbably, "but we have no naval alliance and you must admit that that is essential to the prosecution of the war. And how can we presuppose that France will join us, or that, granting her aid, she will not demand much severer terms than if we were to treat with Great Britain? I, personally, do not like the reputation for intrigue and deception which taints the court of Louis XVI."

Nelson was on ground that he was rabid to defend. "If France supports us, we should not be concerned with her internal policy!"

"But surely that is an indication of the treatment we must expect from her. I do not believe she would pour either money or men into

the Colonies without foreknowledge of her reward, or at least without the assurance that she will gain as much by the success of our cause as we. It seems to me the truth of the matter is that there are some who are afraid to await the arrival of commissioners lest the dispute should be settled much against their will, even upon the admission of our own terms."

"You are speaking of Mr. Richard Lee and Mr. Adams, I venture." Nathaniel laughed.

"You know what I think of them," Braxton replied, smiling at the obviousness of his thrust. "But it is more serious than that, I believe. It is not merely a question of individuals. Land claims in the West are still a constant threat of trouble between the Colonies and they should be settled before we are lugged into independence."

"Settlement of that problem will require months of arbitration," Corbin interposed.

"Exactly!" Braxton went on heatedly. "But unless these disputes are healed before the assertion of independence, I do not see what is to prevent the continent being torn in pieces by intestine wars and convulsions." He paused and looked around the room at his listeners. "When I see a coalition formed sufficient to withstand the power of Great Britain or any other country, then am I for an independent state and all its consequences, as I think they will produce happiness for America."

"Those are not the words of a radical, sir." Nelson grinned.

"The step is profound enough to justify, to demand, caution. That is why I fear Colonel Henry's impetuosity, and would rather see him in the field than in the Convention or the Congress."

"Yet I remember," Sheldon flared up, "that Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Washington, Mr. Pendleton, Mr. Randolph, yourself, sir, and you, too, Mr. Nelson, seemed to feel the weight of his words in St. John's. Whose, then, is the intimidating voice in Congress?"

"Jefferson told me himself," Braxton said quietly, "that in Congress Henry realized, when they came to specific matters requiring sober reasoning, that his declamation, however excellent in its proper place, had no weight at all in such an assembly of cool-headed, judicious men and that he ceased, in a great measure, to take part in the business."

"Yet when the Virginia Convention appointed him Colonel of the

First Regiment," Sheldon interrupted, "Colonel Washington lost little time declaring that his countrymen made a mistake in taking Henry from the Senate and placing him in the field. Mr. Henry may have his faults, but I do not believe he can be bribed to inaction by a meaningless commission. Who lacked the courage to tell him he was not really wanted anywhere?"

The announcement of supper came as a welcome relief to all but Sheldon. He would have liked to fight it out to the bitter end, for the whole affair had troubled him ever since Lieutenant Travis had returned to Norfolk with news of Henry's indignation. It seemed that injustice was not a rarity in Virginia. Nathaniel tried to prevail upon him to stay for supper and spend the night, but he knew that they would never allow him to return to the subject and he wanted to find Will.

"May I have a word with you, sir, before I go?" he asked Braxton, who, with some unwillingness, saw him to the front steps. For an uncomfortable moment, each man searched the eyes of the other. In Braxton's, there was apprehension; in Sheldon's, stubborn determination. "Do you refuse, sir, to use your influence in Mr. Desmond's behalf?"

"Surely you see that is impossible!" Braxton exploded. "Already, in certain diabolical quarters, I am accused of being a Tory. How do you expect me to defend a Tory I do not even know and preserve one shred of self-respect?"

"You are not willing to take my word that he is innocent?"

"It's not a question of your word," Braxton replied as calmly as he could. "It's Desmond's word which you are merely echoing."

Color flamed in Sheldon's face. "Then you will understand, sir, if Mr. Desmond is not acquitted, why I shall resign my commission!"

Braxton stepped back, appalled. "Surely it is not in you to do anything as rash and stupid as that!"

Blazing green eyes gave Braxton his answer before Sheldon said in a voice rigid as steel, "It's injustice I've been fighting, and I'll go on fighting it!"

"I'll promise you this," Braxton compromised wearily. "Mr. Desmond will be well-treated."

"Well-treated is not enough, sir. Only complete exoneration can compensate for his treatment in Norfolk."

When Sheldon rode away, followed by Lacey, he could feel Braxton's eyes on him. With every issue that arose, it seemed their friendship was strained nearer the breaking point. They had begun with the same principle but drifted apart with every new interpretation of it.

"I TOLD you no good would come of your joining Woodford's regiment!" Sheldon and Will were sitting in Will's tent on upturned logs, trying to talk above the howling of an east wind that had risen to a gale with the approach of night. Even though they were muffled to the ears in heavy woolen clothing, they had shivered through the length of Sheldon's story which began with the departure from Williamsburg and ended at The Grove.

"We drove Dunmore out of Norfolk," Sheldon reminded him heatedly, but chattering teeth robbed his words of their intended sarcasm.

"Yes, I reckon you did, all right. But that hasn't stopped him plundering plantations on the James." He stopped to spit vigorously. "Now that you're one of Woodford's men, it's hardly fittin' fer you to join us in the rumpus we mean to stir up over Colonel Henry's treatment, and I reckon that's just as outrageous as anything Dunmore's done."

"You don't think I approve of it, do you! God's teeth, Will, don't you think I know there's not another man in the Colony who has the power with the people that he has? But when the fighting began and it was always the Committee this and the Committee that and not a word of Colonel Henry I saw, for the first time, it was really a conspiracy meant to cripple his power. I don't wonder you say feeling is bitter in camp against the Committee. I heard about Colonel Henry's protest. But Will, you did say—"

"Oh, yes, we were sent to Hampton. Action, Sheldon," and he laughed harshly, drawing out his pipe. "What did we do? Sat around like a lot of bloody toy soldiers till along comes a sloop. Havin' nothin' better to do, we decide to make out her identity. Captain Barron takes twenty of us in a fast sailing boat out to Turk Island to bring her in. She has some salt and linen and a few other things aboard. Seems she was a government vessel bound for the eastern

shore for provisions and the captain, Collett, was as villainous a Britisher as I ever saw. We just hung around after taking our prize, waiting for more action, but we saw damned little. Colonel Henry was down there, but when he sent the prisoners up here I was with the men detailed for guard. Like my luck, ain't it?" He grinned sourly. "Anyhow, that was all the fightin' I did."

They sat in silence for a long time, Will puffing on his pipe, Sheldon tracing patterns on the dirt floor with his scabbard.

"How about a drink?" Will suggested finally. "My belly's damn near froze."

"There's just one question I want to ask you while we're alone," Sheldon said, but he hadn't yet decided how to put it. "It's about the Desmonds."

Will stood up and stretched his back. Then, working his hand in under the neck of his hunting shirt, he began to scratch his chest. The sensation seemed to please him, but the time he took at it puzzled Sheldon. Usually, the mere mention of trouble in connection with the Desmonds would have sent him flying off the handle.

"I've figgered what I'm goin' to do," he said at last.

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you after the trial. They may let him go, and then it won't be necessary." He picked up his round fur cap with its drooping bucktail. "You know, Sheldon, this war ain't what I thought it was goin' to be. If we fought like this for what we wanted in the Ohio country, you'd see what was left of us crawlin' back on our knees to the Tidewater."

"I'm going to Bruton Parish tomorrow morning and pray for the sanity of the Committee of Safety," and Sheldon smiled as he blew out the candle Will had fitted into the neck of a whiskey bottle.

"An' you'll find the Committee there prayin' for themselves, like as not," Will returned, setting a fast pace toward Duke of Gloucester Street and the Bull's Head Tavern.

SHELDON tried to slip into Bruton Parish church unobserved by Colonel Braxton, Nathaniel Burwell and Tom Nelson, who rode up

and dismounted just as he reached the steps. If Evelyn were in Williamsburg, this was the one place he was certain to find her.

He climbed the stairs to the west gallery and took a seat. Then his eyes swept the gathering, but no face held his attention more than an instant until it came to rest on Eustice Buford's lean profile. Leaning back to nod to George Wythe, Buford obscured the figure seated next to him, but Sheldon knew that it was Evelyn even before he caught sight of her head covered by a narrow-brimmed hat whose up-turned back exposed a cascade of short, dark curls. The sermon was completely lost upon him and he failed to drop to his knees in prayer until he realized with a start that he was conspicuously sitting over a kneeling congregation.

After the services he made his way apprehensively to the entrance, remembering another near-meeting at a church and an even more disastrous one at the Raleigh Tavern. During the last days at Norfolk, when his mind could not lay aside the injustice of Foutré's report, and his anger had risen to such a point that he found it difficult to carry out his duties, words that Evelyn had spoken would intrude upon his chaotic thoughts. He would find himself arguing Desmond's case with her as if the strong slender figure which seemed to stand before him were not a mere illusion. Then, riding back to Williamsburg at the head of his company in the absence of Lieutenant Travis and Captain Meade, he could not pass through pine woods or sight a rail fence without remembering the day in Chericoke woods, or visualizing her on Colonel Braxton's chestnut horse, taking a five-foot fence as if it were a sapling across a path.

Standing at the gate of the church wall, he prayed that she would come out alone, that his pulse would stop throbbing and his face not give him away with a rush of crimson.

The wind of the night before had abated, but the air was still damp and cold. Wrapped in a greatcoat, he seemed a young giant beside the figures who passed him: Through the shadowy opening of the church door, he saw Braxton approaching. Retreating as quickly as he could to the churchyard, he pretended a great interest in the state of the weather-scarred tombstones, when he realized with a sinking of his heart that Evelyn and Eustice walked at Braxton's side. What Sheldon did then, he could only attribute to impulsiveness. For no other

reason could he have elbowed his way past Mr. Wythe and Edmund Randolph and Tom Nelson without speaking, pretending not to have seen them. But he had no mind to let Evelyn escape him this time.

Breathless, he presented himself to her, his broad-brimmed hat crushed under his arm. It seemed to him that she tightened the arm resting on Eustice's, and that her face, unusually pale, blanched even more at sight of him. But Eustice's eyes, raised in surprise, were friendly.

"Sheldon Hilliard!" he cried in his resounding voice and, pulling his arm free of Evelyn's, he extended his hand.

Sheldon took it eagerly. He knew that Eustice had saved an awkward situation by a cordiality that could only be attributed to ignorance of the misunderstanding between Evelyn and himself.

"I did not look to see you in Williamsburg, sir," Sheldon told him.

"And you would not have seen me here if my young patriot hadn't tried to ruin her good health," Eustice replied, scowling at Evelyn.

"You have been ill!" Sheldon exclaimed, and though she replied to him, she kept her eyes on her father.

"It was nothing. If Mrs. Cooper had minded her own business, father would never have known."

"Don't talk like that," Eustice admonished. "Mrs. Cooper has earned my gratitude for the rest of time. I really thought—"

"Father, please. Do let's go on."

Braxton laid his hand solicitously on Evelyn's arm. "I should like very much to accept your invitation to dinner, but I fear you are tired. Perhaps another time?"

"No, no," Evelyn protested. "It is only the chill in the air, Colonel Braxton. Believe me, my invitation was meant in all sincerity. If you can only overlook Mrs. Cooper's volubility—"

"My dear Evelyn, it would require more than Mrs. Cooper's volubility to deprive me of the pleasure of taking dinner with you, but there is just one other thing. Wednesday is the twenty-third, and on that day I intend to present my credentials to Congress. Today is the last chance I shall have to discuss a matter of considerable importance with Sheldon."

"But Sheldon must certainly take dinner with us, too, unless he has another engagement," Eustice broke in.

Evelyn did not press the invitation. In fact, Sheldon thought she shrugged her shoulders almost resignedly when he replied, "I would be honored, sir."

Coming from the dining-room after dinner, Braxton took Sheldon's arm and whispered, "If I were as young as you, I'd rescue Evelyn from that infernal chatterbox. Think, boy, she's been caged with her all the while we've been sitting over port."

"But, sir, she hasn't addressed a word to me all evening. I am afraid my presence here is very distasteful to her."

"You must put that to rights," Braxton admonished, and then they came into the drawing-room where Evelyn sat, listening with only slightly veiled boredom to Mrs. Cooper's irrepressible chatter. At the entrance of the men, Evelyn raised pleading eyes to Braxton and said in a tone of weary impatience, "Tell Mrs. Cooper that Thomas Paine is not a Virginian in disguise. I have failed to convince her."

Braxton smiled indulgently at Mrs. Cooper's round and florid face. "Mr. Paine is lately from England and lives now in Philadelphia," he explained as if he were talking to a child. "Are you a devotee of *Common-Sense*, madam?"

"I think there is much to be said for it," Mrs. Cooper asserted, her fat neck and multitude of chins quivering with emphasis.

"There is this to be said for it," Mr. Cooper amended. "*Common-Sense* is the only thing that convinced Emeline there was trouble between England and the Colonies!"

"Well it's coarse and dull and erroneous in many instances," Buford grumbled. "If he had just made the simple statement, 'reconciliation is hopeless'—"

"What is *Common-Sense*, sir, and who is Paine?" Sheldon was curious. Things happened so fast these days one couldn't keep up with them.

"A pamphlet," Buford told him, "that Paine published at the suggestion of Benjamin Rush, it seems, and with the approval of Ben Franklin and Sam Adams, haranguing the populace about the rights of man. They say more than a hundred thousand copies have been sold. Such papers are dangerous in the hands of the uneducated. I am not in favor of over-caution, but I believe the strength of the

Colonies has lain in their reasoning, judicious demands. This fellow Paine is a rabble-rouser."

"But his arguments are not unreasonable, Father," Evelyn protested.

"I hear that General Washington approves of it," Braxton said. "He feels that it is working a powerful change in the opinions of a great many Virginians, particularly as it was followed by the act of Parliament closing all American ports and authorizing the confiscation of American ships and cargoes—"

"That is true," Buford conceded, "but its errors weaken it. Had it come from a more dignified and reliable pen—"

"It would not have been read by the general populace," Evelyn interrupted.

Buford threw up his hands. "My daughter will explain it to you, sir, since her father is so signally lacking in intelligence."

"Father, please don't misunderstand," Evelyn pleaded, but Eustice was off on a subject he enjoyed discussing in Braxton's presence—the condition of the men in the army of Virginia.

While Braxton, Cooper and Buford were arguing about the duties of the Committee of Safety, an argument in which the thin, sallow-faced Mr. Cooper betrayed such ignorance of the situation that Buford had to put a check on his temper; and while Mrs. Cooper was engrossed in a conversation she was trying to understand, Sheldon seized the opportunity he had been waiting for. Bending over Evelyn he said in a low, urgent voice, "Is there anywhere I can speak to you for a moment alone, Evelyn? I have something to tell you that *must* be said."

She looked at him directly for the first time. "We can sit on the sofa," she said, rising. "No one will hear you there."

"Please, not here," he implored, nodding surreptitiously toward Mrs. Cooper.

With reluctance that upset him more than the indifference of her tone, she led him across the hall to a small room which, when she had lighted the candles, proved to be a disordered office. "Mr. Cooper often lets me come in here to read. I think he knows well enough how tiring Emeline can be," she told him.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since the spring of the year," she replied with a sigh. Her bright

green challis dress with its simple collar of white lawn heightened the little color there was in her face, but it could not brighten her eyes. He had noticed, at the church, their unfamiliar dullness and the faint shadows beneath them, but looking full at her for the first time in the dimly lit room, the shadows seemed even deeper, her eyes more expressionless than he would have believed they could be. Only her agitated breathing gave him any hope that his presence stirred in her some emotion other than resentment. But she was so stubborn, he thought desperately, that if she did feel any other emotion, she would not allow him to know it.

"You have been very ill, Evelyn?" he asked gently.

"No, not very," she answered as if his concern irritated her. "I caught a chill. The weather has been so bitterly cold. I expect you found it even colder in Norfolk."

"Yes, it was—very cold—freezing at times." How foolishly prosaic this conversation is, he thought. How ridiculous for us to be wasting precious moments talking about the weather.

"I know what you have been doing. Colonel Braxton told me. Evelyn, you have been working too hard. Oh, my dear, believe me, it's not the kind of work for a woman!" His nerves were quivering with the effort to keep his hands from hers. Would she yield by so much as a glance that was not utterly impersonal—

"Indeed!" she cried. "You sing a different tune now, Sheldon. Once you told me that I would not try very hard to think of a way to help. But I have helped, and it has been far-reaching." Her words held a bitter taunt, thrusting them so far apart that he felt he was looking at her across an endless chasm.

"I don't doubt that you have helped. But what right had Francis Foutré to bring you into it in the first place? He—"

She was moving toward the door, and he realized, panic-stricken, that she was refusing to hear him out. He rushed after her and put his hand over hers on the knob. "I'm sorry. If I offended you, I offer my apologies," he said, and when she looked up, it was into a face as expressionless as her own. When he took his hand away, she let hers drop to her side, but she remained standing at the door with her back pressed against the frame. "When you mention Francis Foutré's name, you recall an unpleasant scene at the Raleigh Tavern—a shameful scene—after which you left us to bear the brunt of your

boorish manners."

"For that, also, I owe you an apology and an explanation."

"I want none. It's long past."

"But you shall have one." His voice, though low, left no doubt of his intention.

Again she slid her hand to the knob, but he caught it, and this time his touch was not light. The pain of his fingers pressing into her flesh caused her to wince and release her hold. In an instant she had regained her composure.

"Take your hand from me, Sheldon," she demanded.

For answer he pulled her across the room to a hard, ladder-backed armchair by the desk and pushed her into it.

"How dare you do this!" The words came out in low-voiced fury, as color flamed in her cheeks.

"You look more natural now." He smiled. "For a while I thought you were too ill to get angry."

She tried to rise, but he pushed her back. With a thud she hit the seat, seeming to be enveloped in the buckling folds of hoops and skirts. "I shall call my father, and have the pleasure of seeing him put you out of this house," she cried, tears of rage filling her eyes.

"Call him, by all means," Sheldon retorted, "if you have not the decency to hear me out!"

"Decency!" she fairly shouted. "What do you know of decency—a man who would treat any woman so!"

"You criticized justly my behavior at the Raleigh Tavern; I have a right to give what defense I can and by gad, I shall give it!"

She made no further effort to move, but listened to him with apparent indifference.

"I met Foutré at the Raleigh the morning I arrived. He spoke of a young lady of Williamsburg in such terms that I could only suppose he intended to marry her. When he parted from me he was going to a rendezvous with her. The shock was naturally great to me when I realized, so shortly afterward, that you were that lady. I did not even know you were in Williamsburg. You gave me no opportunity to know it. Not since that last night in Colonel Braxton's house have you ever allowed me to know where you were or what you were doing!" He had stood before her as he spoke so that by no sudden movement could she escape him, and his eyes, intense and burning

with reproach, had drawn hers from their disinterested wandering about the room to rest with sudden understanding on his face. But when he had finished speaking, he turned from her and moved to the window, his senses swept into turmoil by the futility of his explanation. She understood now. He knew that. He thought she even forgave him, but she didn't love him. How much better it would have been had he never come to this house; to have gone on hoping would have been preferable to the experience of hearing her spring to the defense of Foutré. Shipley with Evelyn! How could he ever have been such a fool to have thought—

"Sheldon."

Her voice behind him spun him round. The trembling of his body at her nearness shamed him. He was so weak, so stupid—

"Why didn't you tell me a long time ago? Why didn't you write to me?"

"I didn't think you would want to see me or read anything I had to write and I was bewildered, Evelyn." His voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"I don't mean that," she cried, and taking his arms in her hands, shook them frantically. "Don't deliberately misunderstand. I mean after Father took me away from Chericoke. I left a message for you with Colonel Braxton. He promised to deliver it, and I am sure he did!"

"But he didn't, Evelyn. He didn't."

"Why didn't you write to me anyhow?"

"The messages that were in my heart? God knows I wish I had."

"Tell me what they were." She smiled. When he drew her into his arms her hands were already on his face, pulling it down until their lips met. Forgotten were the months of separation as he clung to her, drinking in the sweetness of her lips, finding in their responsiveness all the assurance of her love he needed to drive away his doubts.

Slowly her hands slid down his face till his chin was resting in her palms. Then gently she pulled away to look at him. The same lights were in the dark pools of her eyes, but they were warm and misty with the shadow of concern. His senses aware of every movement of her fingers, he watched her eyes move over his face.

"Darling, you have gotten terribly thin," she said. "Perhaps we have needed the strength of each other."

He took her hands in his and pressed them to his lips.

"I want to hear every single thing you've done since we parted at Chericoke," she went on softly.

He raised his head and glanced about the room. "I'll stir up the fire and we can sit over there on the sofa."

The happy, excited ring of his voice thrilled her. What fools they had been to sacrifice so much to pride and pig-headedness. Wasn't there more than pride in the realization that she had given him, in these few moments, the happiness that was in his smile and voice and the exultation that was in his eyes?

Sitting beside him, her hand in his, she watched the flickering patterns of the fire play along the taut lines of his face.

He was silent for so long that she finally asked, "What are you thinking about, Sheldon?"

He turned to face her, but still, for a moment, he did not speak. He seemed to be searching her eyes, holding them steady to his. And then he said, "Will you marry me now, Evelyn? We have some happiness coming to us out of this chaos, and there'll never be any for me until I have you beside me day and night."

"That's what I want, too!" she whispered. "As much as you do, my darling. But how can it be when you are fighting, and," her voice lifted on a proud note, "I am fighting in my own way? The only way I can."

"We can fight together!" His grip, tightening on her fingers, hurt her.

She shook her head slowly. "If we were married my fight would have to end, and I don't think it should."

"But why—why—"

"Because our ways are so different now. The war will soon be over and then I promise you—"

"Soon be over? It has just begun." His voice had a desperate, cutting edge. "Can you wait that long—do you feel no more strongly than that?"

"You know how I feel."

"Then, for God's sake, Evelyn, marry me now. This madness for you follows me everywhere. Point Pleasant, Norfolk, here—I'm never free of it."

"I know. I have felt it, too." She lifted his hard, brown hand to her

cheek, feeling the strength of it against her skin. "We must wait a little longer. Separation would be more unbearable if we were married—I know that."

He shook his head. "Nothing could be." Quietly he drew her closer and, feeling her tremble, put his lips lightly to her cheeks and eyes and mouth. "It isn't just that I want you as I've never wanted anything in my life, Evelyn. So many times I've wanted your judgment of the things I've done, the decisions I've made."

"Tell me about them, Sheldon, and I'll tell you why the little I've done to help has only been accomplished by wanting to fight as long as you were fighting."

"And yet you say we cannot fight together." He watched a log crumble in embers on the hearth. "Yesterday evening at The Grove I expressed an opinion before men whose honesty and intelligence I respect," he went on musingly, "and they disagreed with me—every one of them. Yet, I still think I'm right. I would go to almost any lengths to prove it, because until I do I shall never trust my conception of justice."

She did not speak. He must go on, thinking aloud, without being too conscious of her attention. That he was troubled by the problem, whatever it was, she could see in his suddenly contracted brows and the fixed intensity of his gaze.

Slowly the story began to unfold, as he had told it at The Grove. At its conclusion, her hand was still in his, but its grip had tightened.

"You would not really resign your commission?" she questioned.

"Yes—I would."

"But that would do no good, Sheldon."

"It would be imperative. I would never defy the Committee of Safety while holding a commission from them," he told her positively.

"And how would you defy them?" A crawling fear chilled her voice.

"I would do everything in my power to free Desmond." He swung around suddenly to face her, eyes afire with the desire to make her understand. "You can see now how much I believe in his innocence. It isn't that he's my friend, Evelyn. It's the principle. My father was a Loyalist, but he would not have fought the country that gave him so much to live for. You could not have lived under his roof without knowing that he loved peace and the extravagant comforts of his life. Yet if a wounded soldier, Tory or patriot, had been borne to

Shipley, he would have cared for him. I believe, under the same circumstances, he would have behaved throughout as Mr. Desmond has, though it cost him every privilege and all the happiness he knew."

Evelyn's expression, shot with doubt and apprehension, made him pause with a catching of his breath. Was it possible that she, too, thought him wrong? That of all his friends, only Will agreed with him? Or did Will agree only because he was in love with Sarah Desmond? If anything could make him falter, it was Evelyn's opinion, yet not even she could weaken the firmness of his conviction.

Her eyes, seeming to see through him, came back to meet his gaze. "Darling, if you were just a little more sober in your judgment, a little more experienced, you would see how futile such a stand would be. If Mr. Desmond is convicted of the charges against him, his property will be confiscated but he will be allowed to leave the Colony if he wishes. What more can you hope for him by helping him to escape, if that is what you mean? His property will be confiscated just the same and he will live in constant dread of being apprehended. The Sons of Liberty are very active—"

"Yes, I know they are, and you work with them. Perhaps I expected too much in hoping that you would understand, steeped as you are in Francis Foutré's doctrines of patriotism. But I would not see Mr. Desmond left to the mercy of the Committee of Safety, to be thrown in jail with common thieves, if it suits their purpose—"

Snatching her hand from his, she rose from the sofa and stood before him white and rigid.

"You temper love so well with sarcasm and insinuation it cuts out the very core of my belief that I could mean anything to you. How you dare, after this evening, to mention me in connection with Francis Foutré—"

"Evelyn!" Eustice's voice boomed through the narrow hall.

"I am coming!" she called back, and moved to the door.

Sheldon was beside her in an instant, contrition in his face, his voice beseeching. "I swear I didn't realize what I was saying! The thought of Foutré drives me crazy. Evelyn, please don't go—please listen to me. I love you—better than—"

"Don't say that word!" she cried, and flinging open the door, rushed out into the hall.

He had no idea how long he had been standing at the window before Braxton came into the room. Time had no meaning. Nothing but the burning question that seared every fiber of his brain had any importance. What had possessed him to force Foutré between them, to break the fine balance of their understanding?

"Are you coming, Sheldon?" Braxton asked.

"Yes, sir, I'm coming. Mr. Buford has gone?"

Braxton nodded. He did not need to be told what had happened in this office nor why Evelyn had bade him and her father such a hasty farewell and rushed up the steps to her room. The explanation was in Sheldon's harassed expression and the rigid set of his mouth. "I will walk to the Raleigh with you. Joe is waiting there with my horse."

They made their adieus, to which Sheldon added an apology for having absented himself so long from the company.

Sheldon adjusted his pace to Braxton's slow step, but he was in no mood for the conversation which seemed to be the purpose of the leisurely stroll.

"I gather from Evelyn's agitation that you did not part on the best of terms, Sheldon," Braxton ventured.

"You are correct, sir. We did not," Sheldon replied shortly.

Braxton clasped his hands behind him and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "I think it is tacitly understood that I am aware of the situation between you and Evelyn, so don't think I am interfering when I suggest that you ought to deal with her more gently. She is headstrong, Sheldon. Eustice has finally discovered that the assertion of authority has no effect upon her whatsoever. He came up here like a snorting bull to order her back to Petersburg, and he was just as successful as he was in forbidding her to leave there in the first place. But the moment he told her how anxious he'd been, how lonely it was without her and how suspicious and ill-mannered Alfred had been to every patriot who had sought cover in his house, he told me that she promised to return with him in May. It's a lesson, Sheldon. We cannot alter people's natures, but we can play upon them if we have sufficient perspicacity."

"I have none, sir," Sheldon admitted dully. "I can see that. I've thrown away the one thing in the world that could make me completely happy simply because I have no tact."

"You have great tact when you wish to exercise it," Braxton contradicted, but Sheldon did not seem to be listening.

"I'm not sure it isn't just as well. Our real difference of opinion is fundamental, sir, just as yours and mine seemed to be the other night—"

"Were you, by any chance, discussing the same subject?"

"Yes. It was important to me to know what Evelyn thought. Our disagreement was perfectly calm and rational until I suggested that she was betraying the influence of Francis Foutré."

"That should be no concern of yours," Braxton rebuked. "But I do not believe that her opinion on that subject was dictated by Foutré—I should say rather by common sense."

"That is where we do not think alike, and never shall."

Braxton glanced up sharply at him.

They were nearing the Raleigh Tavern. "Nathaniel asked me to bring you back to The Grove. I think it would be well if you accepted his invitation. He feels that you left the other evening under a misapprehension."

"Misapprehension, sir? I do not think so. Doubt and suspicion were in all your faces. It was obvious that you did not trust my judgment."

"Trust is too strong a word, Sheldon. We felt that you might have been misled. But let me give you the news I have for you. Perhaps it will make you consider your responsibility in a new light. Your promotion to the rank of captain of regulars has been approved and your commission is to be delivered to you tomorrow. Colonel Woodford sent an enviable tribute to your valor with his recommendation."

Sheldon's expression underwent a swift change that was gratifying to Braxton. His lips parted in a reluctant smile, and the twitching muscles in his cheeks relaxed. "I thought Colonel Woodford would certainly withdraw his recommendation after our last conversation."

"You knew of it, then?" Braxton asked. There was incredulity in his frown and in the tone of his voice.

"Lieutenant Travis and Colonel Woodford both intimated as much, sir—in Norfolk."

"And knowing that, you made the decision you expressed to me and the others?"

"Yes, sir. But that doesn't lessen my pleasure in knowing Colonel Woodford thought my services at Norfolk justified promotion. I hope

I shall be able to keep the commission! Please express my thanks to Mr. Burwell, sir. Unfortunately I have a previous engagement."

The two men stopped before the Raleigh Tavern, and Joe led Braxton's sorrel mare to the mounting block.

"Where's Pepper?" Sheldon asked.

Braxton put his foot into the stirrup. "I sold him," he answered.

"Sold him?"

"Yes. I was offered such a price for him I felt it would be foolish not to take it." Braxton's air of casualness and his apparent haste to be off did not deceive Sheldon. Only the most serious financial straits could have induced him to part with Pepper.

"Sir, there is something I must say to you. Will you spare me a moment in the Raleigh over a tankard of beer?"

"I would like to, but I haven't time. Can you tell me here?"

"I will try. It's about Shipley. There is more land there than I shall ever need. I have had it in mind for a long time to ask you—to implore you—to take two hundred cultivated acres and allow me to feel that I have made some effort to repay you for what you've done."

Braxton laid a hand on his shoulder. "That is kind of you, Sheldon, but it is out of the question."

"Then I shall have to try to run the plantation myself. I can't have you looking after my interests for nothing, sir."

"Believe me, it has been no trouble. Bacon brings me his books, I check them, tell him what to order—it's all done in no time, and with very little personal expense. I have taken those expenses out of receipts as you suggested."

Sheldon ran his hand the length of the horse's silken neck. "I should like to ask you a question, sir, but I fear that you might take it amiss."

Braxton smiled affectionately at him. He thought he knew what was in his mind. Probably he had heard about George Brooke's going security for those debts of his. A man's own business wasn't private any longer.

"I think you are safe in asking me," he said.

"Well, sir, I know that times are hard for men like you who are merchants as well as planters. It's no fault of yours that shipping and trade are so seriously curtailed. Oh, damn it, sir, if you need help, won't you allow me to serve you as my father would have done? I am so much in your debt, it would be a kindness if you would." There

was no mistaking the concern that clouded his glance.

"Yes, I will tell you if you can ever help me," Braxton promised, but as he rode off Sheldon knew that he never would. He held a sort of barrier of pride athwart any admission of failure.

11

SHELDON turned down the street toward Richard Singleton's lodging house. Ever since he had come back to Williamsburg, he had intended to call upon Christopher Desmond, but the disappointing nature of his report made him apprehensive of the meeting. He could see no way of making the truth appear less unpleasant than it was, and he feared that Desmond would take it hard on Sarah's account.

When Singleton brought him word that Desmond was indisposed and would see him in his room, he presented himself with growing uneasiness, which he tried to disguise beneath a cheerful smile. But neither Desmond nor Sarah would allow the masquerade to continue. As soon as the negro wench who had opened the door to him had disappeared into the adjoining room, Sarah rose from her chair by the window and laid down her needlework. The days of anxiety were clear in her pallid face and her haste to inquire, "What has happened?"

"Sarah, have you forgotten your manners!" Desmond chided. He was sitting up in bed. The flaccid skin of his face and neck trembled with his congested breathing. "You are a rare, good sight, Sheldon. Sarah and I have been hoping daily for a visit from you." He held out an unsteady hand. "In spite of her abrupt greeting, our desire has not been solely to hear the news you have for us. How have you been?"

"Well, sir. But you—"

"Uncle Chris has been very sick," Sarah answered, the futile anger in her tone a warning of what was coming. "But it's no wonder. He was brought here in an open wagon, handcuffed to a filthy slave." She told him of the long, degrading journey, the scarcity of food, the bitter nights with no cover save the clothes they wore.

"And you?" he asked, outraged.

"She wouldn't leave me, Sheldon. It was useless to argue. I had no

idea what a wilful lass she is," Desmond sighed.

"You, too, came here like that? I wish to God I had known this fifteen minutes ago. But you were not ill, Sarah?"

"She's strong as she is wilful, I reckon," Desmond answered, and pride shot through the reproach.

Sheldon's eyes fell on the sapphire pendant resting against the bodice of her worn challis dress. "I see they didn't take that from you," he observed caustically.

"I hid it," she said. "Nothing could make me part with it. Perhaps, someday, it will bring me the good fortune my mother claimed it would."

Sheldon stood, looking from one to the other, fury and incredulity as strong in his face as the shame he felt about the whole procedure. We are no better than the worst of the Tories, he thought, tempestuously. Even Dunmore couldn't have committed an outrage more dastardly than that. Aloud he declared, "The Committee of Safety shall hear of this, sir, in terms which will not leave them in doubt of their cruelty, and utter lack of decency."

"You must not take it so," Desmond admonished. "In their eyes I am guilty until I can prove my innocence. And they have given me my parole when they might have confined me in the jail!"

"You are generous, sir." The words were clipped and bitter. Sheldon took off his greatcoat, drew a straight-backed chair to the bed and sank down onto it with the listlessness of despair. Sarah was staring at him. He could feel her eyes, intense, penetrating, as if she were waiting for him to tell her that he had arranged everything; that he had convinced the Committee of Safety her uncle was innocent; that they could go back to Hanover and resume their quiet life. And here he was to tell her that his word carried no weight with his own people; that her uncle had little chance for justice.

Silence was heavy in the room. Sarah went back to her chair by the window and Desmond folded his hands in his lap.

"Now tell me what news you have for me," he said quietly. "Whatever it is, I must know."

"I'm afraid I have none," Sheldon told him, fastening his eyes on the coverlet, "except that you will be tried in due course."

"I have no defense, save my word—no witnesses—"

"Except me," Sarah declared.

"I'm afraid that will not do much good," Sheldon told her. "Where are Speddin and Norris? If it were possible to get a statement from them—I think I could manage that." He was thinking of Colonel Corbin who might intercede for Desmond if he had the support of witnesses.

"Lord Dunmore provided two sloops for Speddin and his family. I don't know about Tom Norris. Some say he got away, swearing he'd join the British in the West. No, Sheldon. There's no hope in that quarter. Tell me, what will they do if they find me guilty?"

Sheldon shifted uneasily in his chair. "I can't exactly say, sir, except that they will confiscate your property—"

"Take my plantation!" Desmond jerked himself upright with violence that brought cold sweat to his face. "I would rather they put me in jail."

Sheldon pushed him gently back against the pillow. "This excitement will only make you sicker than you are, and you must get well. You must! I haven't finished this fight, and I'll need your help."

"Will Sarah be allowed to return to England?" Desmond's heavy eyelids stretched out of countless wrinkles as they closed wearily.

"Yes, I should think so." Sheldon could give him that comfort with almost certain assurance.

"But I shan't! I've told you before, Uncle Chris, I mean to stay with you."

With a sickening sense of futility, Sheldon rose from his chair and moved to the window. For a moment he stood looking out. A corner of the House of Burgesses caught his eye. He began to visualize the trial. "In the absence of witnesses to the defense, the Tory, Christopher Desmond, found guilty of the charges against him, namely: giving assistance to the enemy and harboring a British officer—"

He swung away from the window and returned to the bedside. "Listen to me, sir!" His voice was urgent, compelling Desmond's attention. "You remember Will McKee, don't you?"

Desmond nodded. "He came with you—"

"That's right. He lives in Augusta on the North River. There is fine land there, sir, that I have been thinking of taking up. If you are not acquitted—"

Desmond shook his head, but Sarah begged him to go on. "Will you promise me this, sir? To plead any excuse to return here after

the trial—if only for a day?”

“Yes. I will promise that,” Desmond agreed.

The trial was held on a blustering, rainy day in the middle of March, defeat seemingly predicted by the elements. Will had convinced Sheldon that his presence at the trial would cast suspicion on himself and do Desmond no good, so they awaited the verdict in the taproom of the Bull’s Head. When Sheldon could stand the suspense no longer, they walked the length of Duke of Gloucester Street and back, arguing about plans that had already been discussed in detail a dozen times between them. Sheldon was glad, in a way, that Patrick Henry had resigned his hollow commission and returned to Scotchtown. He would certainly charge this defense of Desmond to sentiment, whose misguiding influence he had condemned so heartily.

“It’s not so difficult,” Will insisted. “Singleton has a good crowd now. All we’ve got to worry about is that they might take Desmond to jail.”

“I think they will allow him to return to Singleton’s under guard,” Sheldon said, confident that somehow Sarah would manage it. She had shown courage and determination today that surprised him. He had been afraid, when he considered the Desmonds’ escape, that Sarah would be as great a burden as her uncle.

“It’s Foutré who bothers me. His interest in this case leaves little hope of leniency.”

“I still don’t see what he’s got to do with it,” Will complained.

“I’ve told you two or three times, Will. He’s a courier of the Sons of Liberty with rather extraordinary power, and he’s been especially active in Norfolk. More than that I cannot tell you. But I have an idea he holds a special grudge against Tories with property. I found him in consultation with Colonel Woodford at headquarters in Norfolk and we nearly flew at each other’s throats over Desmond’s case. I reckon he hasn’t forgotten.”

Will pulled the collar of his greatcoat closer about his neck. They were walking in a fine drizzle that dripped from his fur cap onto the end of his nose. He shook his head and cursed. “I’d a sight rather

have a drink in my hand than rain in my face, Sheldon. Reckon you won't jump out o' your skin if we go back to the Bull's Head?"

They turned around, bending against the wind, but before they reached the Tavern they saw Sarah running breathlessly toward them, head down, skirts flying, unmindful of the people in the street who stopped to stare at her. She almost collided with Sheldon before she saw him.

"Oh!" she gasped and seized his arm in a desperate grip. "Sheldon! I thought I'd find you at Mr. Singleton's. You must do something! You must! They're taking Uncle Chris to jail. Mr. Foutré built up such a lying case against him. It was horrible!"

Sheldon drew her arm through his and walked her briskly toward Richard Singleton's house. Will, on her other side, scowled heavily. It seemed as if they were licked for fair. If he had Sheldon's looks and charm, by gad, he'd keep after Sarah till she married him and let him take her away from all this mess. Maybe Augusta didn't have all the advantages a young lady like her was used to, but he'd make her happy. He'd show her what peace and happiness and freedom there was in the simple life of the frontier. But she was monstrous stubborn about her uncle. More'n likely she wouldn't go anywhere without him. A thought struck him with such suddenness that he stopped dead.

"What's the matter with you?" Sheldon rasped.

"Nothin'. Nothin'." He started on, but his step was lighter than it had been in weeks. As they walked into Singleton's house he began to whistle a tune. It was a Ranger's song that Sheldon hadn't heard since the days on the Kanawha.

Fortunately, the parlor was unoccupied, and it required but a word with Singleton to assure themselves that they would be alone in it for at least half an hour.

"Sarah, I want you to tell me exactly what happened." Sheldon pushed an armchair up to the small fire for her, and drew up another for himself.

"I've hardly got my breath," she said, and he saw that her hands, folded in her lap, were trembling.

Will had withdrawn to the end of the room, and taking out his pipe, began to fill it from his leather pouch. Leaning against the window jamb he stared out at Singleton's livery. But he scarcely saw the

stable boys grooming and feeding the hirelings, or heard Sarah's description of the trial, so preoccupied was he with his sudden inspiration.

"Uncle Chris's petition was referred to ten judges. He told them just what he told you in Norfolk, and then they wanted to know if he had any witnesses to his defense. He told them I had been in the room during the meeting with Mr. Speddin and Mr. Norris, but they didn't seem to think that was sufficient. Then they asked him about Captain Fortescue—where he first met him; why he thought the Captain had asked to be carried to his house. If Uncle Chris were well, I am sure he would have been able to exonerate himself. But he was tired and nervous and terribly upset, and he just said that he would not bar his door to any man in distress, Tory or patriot. Then one of the men said, 'But you took care not to let his presence in your house be known,' and that made Uncle Chris angry. He said, 'Certainly not. He was badly wounded and needed rest and care, which I doubt he would have had at the hands of the militia.' Oh, there were words back and forth, and then Mr. Foutré was sworn in. He wove such a fabric of lies that I could scarcely blame the judges for their decision. He said it was prearranged that Uncle Chris should receive all the wounded we could take after Lord Dunmore retired to Norfolk and that he had deliberately defied the boycott of food to the British by sending provisions to the ships under cover of darkness."

With a sigh of despair she sank back against the chair, and pressed her open palms against her cheeks. It was several minutes before she continued in a small, sharp voice: "Having told these vicious lies, he took great pains to exonerate me. But he convinced them that Uncle Chris should be confined to the jail to await further orders from the Committee of Safety." Turning her eyes to the fire, she went on, bitterly reflective, "I shall never forget Mr. Foutré's expression. His face was as hard as granite. I declare, he acted as if he were having a day of reckoning with a life-long enemy. I couldn't understand it. Even if Uncle Chris had done all the things he accused him of, it was no reason to hate him, to lie to hurt him. Yet, for a moment, I had the feeling that he believed his accusations were true. That was when he turned to Uncle Chris and said that jail was too good for any traitor to the Colonies. His voice trembled and his eyes were blazing. Uncle Chris just shook his head as if he felt sorry for him."

She rested her cheek against a small fist, and closed her eyes.

"You must be worn out, Sarah," Sheldon said softly, and found that his own voice was near to trembling. "It's the most damnable thing I've ever heard of. They rant about justice. God, they make a mockery of it. As for Foutré, he and his kind are the traitors. Mad with a little power; fanatical to the point of inhumanity. No balance, no discrimination—"

Will, coming between them, put a check to Sheldon's diatribe. "Will you stay here, Miss Sarah?" he asked.

"I don't know what to do. I feel so confused. I suppose I was too confident that Uncle Chris would be acquitted."

"Aye, an' he will, by those who matter." Will smiled. "Do you listen to me, both of you." His long face grew seriously intent; his eyes, first on one then the other, gleamed with the excitement always aroused by such a plan as he was about to propose. "Sheldon will take you to Shipley"—he raised a hand at Sheldon's protesting scowl—"and there you will wait for me. That's all you need to know, either of you."

"It's not all *I* intend to know," Sheldon said, rising in protest from his chair. He wished Will wouldn't spring things on him like this.

"It's all you *will* know," Will repeated with a determined thrust of his jaw. "You have two horses, Sheldon."

"What about Lacey and Sarah's negro woman?"

"Use your wits, man!" Will cried. "Find him a wagon and let him drive the negro woman with Miss Sarah's belongings to Shipley. But you and Miss Sarah walk to the woods beyond the encampment and have Lacey bring the horses to you there. It would be foolish to arouse suspicion."

"I can't leave Uncle Chris," Sarah declared, "though I appreciate—"

"By the Almighty, Miss Sarah, will you do as I ask? I don't mean for you to leave your uncle." Impatiently he questioned Sheldon. "Can I depend on you?"

Sheldon nodded. He was beginning to understand. "There is just the matter of a resignation."

Will strode along Duke of Gloucester Street toward the encampment, whistling softly to himself. The rain had nearly stopped and the

scudding clouds were moving out to sea. With any luck, the weather would break now, and the warm Tidewater spring was just what he wanted. In truth, he had good reason for requesting leave. There was planting to be done. A man couldn't let a thousand acres of prime land take care of itself, or see his house tumble down for want of repairs. He had given his six months to the army. He had a right to go back to Augusta.

Captain Sayres listened to him with reluctant appreciation. "You say you have served six months?"

"Aye, sir. More'n that, really. I was with Colonel Henry in Hanover."

"There's been a string of them this last week, asking for leave," Sayres grumbled. "All giving the same reason."

"Valley men, I reckon, sir," Will ventured. "Can't let their land go to weeds when there are men servin' whose farms are nearer to hand."

"That's true. I don't say I blame you," Sayres admitted. "Some of them left without leave—volunteers like yourself." He pushed a piece of paper across the table that stood between them. "Make out your application. I'll have to get Colonel Christian's approval."

"Will it take long, sir? You might tell Colonel Christian I was with Captain Stuart in Dunmore's War, sir. I reckon that'll convince him I ain't new at this game. He was out there."

"It'll convince him you aren't afraid of fighting, McKee. You might find yourself in service out there again. The Indians are getting troublesome, thanks to Conolly."

12

"SAY, where'd ya get all that money?" Jim Holden wanted to know, when Will stood him and Ben Claiborn to a third round of brandies.

"That's what I got for scarin' the British out of Hampton," Will laughed, slapping the paper currency on the bar. "Reckon they won't like the look of it in Augusta, so I might as well spend it here."

Will managed to keep one drink behind his companions and yet give the impression that he was waiting for them to catch up with him.

"It's black as a nigger's beam end outside," Ben Claiborn observed. "Makes it seem cold. Reckon I could do with another drink. It's on

me, this time, Will."

Bluish-gray smoke mingled with the rank odor of stale tobacco and spirits in the small pine-paneled tap-room of Jane Vobe's Ordinary. As thick and heated as the atmosphere was the talk. Everybody—and there were dozens crowded into the little room—seemed determined to air his views on the subject of Patrick Henry. The *Virginia Gazette* had just announced the Congress's appointment of Henry to the colonelcy of the first battalion of Virginia forces in the army of the United Colonies.

"'Tis a lash in the face," someone shouted above the voices of the others, "an' I'd favor seeing him resign before he accepts it."

"A colonel's a colonel," a large, red-faced sergeant asserted. "I wouldn't complain."

"But he was Commander-in-Chief of all the troops before. Now he's only commander of a regiment. What d'ya think that means—a bloody promotion?" the first speaker demanded.

From somewhere else another voice announced that every vessel that could swim was being taken up in England to carry troops, ammunition and provisions to fight the colonists.

Will's head began to buzz. In spite of all his care, it seemed as if the brandy was beginning to play tricks with him. He had to get out of here and shake off his companions; and on the way out let them think he was even drunker than he was. He bought a bottle of brandy and announced that he was going.

"Goin' to do a little drinkin' by yourself?" Jim Holden asked.

"Tent gets damned cold," Will muttered. "Reckon I'd better have some stored by me. I ain't never thawed out since I was down in Hampton."

"Listen to him!" Jim roared. "Hell, it gets colder than that in Augusta I'll bet. Thought you were hard, Will!"

Will's companions started to laugh. Their laughter, growing uncontrollable, followed his broad swaying back out of the room. It was the last thing he heard when the cold night air hit him in the face and he pulled the door shut behind him.

He untied his horse and led it down the street toward the House of Burgesses. The fresh air drove the brandy fumes from his head. He'd be all right by the time he reached the jail if he walked all the way. He began thinking of Sheldon and Sarah. They'd be at Shipley by now,

wondering what the devil he was going to do. Sheldon would have his suspicions and kick himself for being out of it, but it was best that he was. For all his love of the Valley and his independent opinions, he was a Tidewater gentleman with a name respected by Tidewater folk. And he was a captain of regulars, unless his resignation had been accepted. And that depended on how he had worded it. But whether it had been accepted or not, it would never be fittin', whatever the reason, for him to help Desmond escape. This way the plan would be carried through without hurting anyone who mattered.

The street lamps ended where Will came around the east end of the House of Burgesses. In the impenetrable darkness, he picked his way until he came to the incline above which, on a square of level ground, the jail was perched. A light in the jailer's window showed him his path. He tethered his horse, and walking up to the door, beat on it till he heard the echo of footsteps on the stairs. Peter Pelham, in dark breeches and coat which he had obviously thrown on in great haste, jerked open the door with a blustering oath and confronted Will. His hair straggled down his cheeks in oily strands, and his sour face was not very encouraging, Will thought.

"Good evenin', Pelham," said Will.

"What do you want, beating down the door to tell me it's a good evening?" Pelham demanded.

"Come to think of it, 'tis not a good evenin'," Will drawled. "It's damned cold."

"Then why aren't you home where it's warm?" Pelham, blocking the doorway, seemed in no mood for conversation.

Will smiled faintly. "Home to me's a tent back of the college and it's colder there than a widow's kiss."

"You're one o' the militia?" Pelham's brows went up, and drawing back a pace he opened the door a little wider. "Come on in."

"Got a message from Captain Fleming to deliver to one o' your prisoners, but I thought I might stop in here a minute and warm myself up if you have no objections. A tot o' brandy—and I see you got a fire burnin'—"

"I was trying to catch a wink of sleep," Pelham said. The shadowy puffs under his bloodshot eyes and the familiar odor of rum breath confirmed Will's suspicion that Pelham had been sleeping off the effects of the bottle.

"Where's your message and who's it for?" Pelham asked irritably. Will tapped his head. "In here—for a Tory named Desmond."

"He don't look like he'll last long," Pelham declared unconcernedly. "Hasn't moved since they brought him in yesterday."

"You can't make me cry over a bloody Tory," Will asserted and spat vigorously into the fire. "A lot o' scum."

"Some's not so bad," Pelham said.

"Show me one. I just been fightin' 'em. They don't smell right to me."

Pelham chuckled, but his eyes were on Will's hands, busy digging the cork out of the brandy bottle with the point of his skinning knife. His eyes continued to follow the hand that raised the bottle. Before Will put it to his lips he paused. "Like a drink?" he asked.

"I don't mind," Pelham accepted, and Will watched his Adam's apple bob up and down with three generous gulps before he had had enough. Spluttering and getting rapidly redder in the face, the jailer wiped off the mouth of the bottle with his sleeve and handed it back to Will. "That's good brandy."

"It'll keep the chill out o' your bones. Mind if I sit down a minute?" Will put the bottle to his lips and tilted it back, but his tongue stopped the flow of the liquor. Then he took a seat without waiting for Pelham's invitation and put the bottle on the table between them. "Help yourself," he said.

Pelham's narrow brow creased thoughtfully. "Have you got an order to speak to the prisoner?" he asked.

"Yes. I got orders. Damned sharp they were, too. Get over here an' back fast as I can." His lips stretched in a grin. "Of course, it can take me a little time to persuade you to let me see him. Captain Fleming'll understand that. You got your orders same as I have. Reckon he forgot to give me it in writin', but he was pretty busy. New squad just come in, tired an' hungry enough to eat their own mothers. Wonder if there'll ever be any kind o' order in this army?" And he was off on the state of the patriots at Hampton and Patrick Henry's distress over the lack of provisions, which led him on to the question of Henry's demotion.

"What d'you think of it, as a citizen?" he asked, and the question caught Pelham with the brandy bottle at his mouth.

With studied casualness the jailer drew his sleeve across his wet

lips, and appeared to examine the question. "Congress must have had a reason. But Patrick Henry's always been my man." He punctuated the assertion with a rumbling belch.

Will leaned back in his chair. "Mine, too. I'd follow him anywhere. Up in Hanover—" He drew the story out, amplifying every detail of the march to Williamsburg, taking care to keep his eyes on the fire as he spoke, but observing with satisfaction that Pelham was reaching more frequently and unsteadily for the bottle. By the time he reached the end of his story, the jailor's head was leaning heavily in the crook of his elbow, supported by the oaken table, and his eyes were shut.

"Wasn't that the thing to do?" Will asked.

He got no answer. Rising from his chair, he stepped quickly to Pelham's side, and felt his pockets for the keys. They were empty. Come to think of it, he remembered seeing some keys hanging on a peg near the door. With the tread that had carried him soundlessly over dry forest carpets, he moved across the floor to the entrance and saw that the keys were there. Swiftly he made his way through the door leading to the cells, moving from one to another like a shadow. At the sight of his face pressed against the grating and the sound of his voice whispering Desmond's name the prisoners' volleys of curses, cat-calls and entreaties were enough, he felt sure, to wake the dead. But he hurried on, certain that morning would find Peter Pelham just where he had left him. When he located Desmond with five other prisoners in a cell not more than ten feet square, he pulled out his skinning knife and held it in front of him while he tried the keys. He had no intention of letting a pack of murderers loose in Williamsburg for the sake of freeing one man. Desmond was at the door, his nose protruding between the bars of the grating.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Never mind that!"

The other occupants of the cell pressed against the door, hopefully wide-eyed.

"I'll kill the first man that steps out o' here after Desmond." Will spat the warning at the grimy faces. "I got a message for you, Desmond, and no funny business or I'll fill your belly for you, too!" He turned the key in the lock and pulled the door back just wide

enough to let Desmond's bulky form slide through. "Stand right there," he ordered and secured the lock again. "Now, out into the courtyard with you." He prodded Desmond in the back with his knife and followed him through the wall door. Behind them, an uproar of protest and profanity rumbled from the cells in the small square.

Will tried the keys in the door opening from the exercise yard onto the street. In the midst of his frantic search, Desmond touched his arm. "I know who you are now. You're McKee. How did you get past the jailer?"

"Not here, for God's sake," Will cried softly. "We're not out of it yet. Those sons o' bitches in there are goin' to wake the town." He found the key, and opened the door a crack. "Now, listen to me, Desmond. When you go out o' here, walk slowly like nothin's happened. My horse is waiting. I know you've been sick, but after you get out o' town on the Richmond Road, ride like hell. You know where Shipley is?"

"No, I don't."

"It's between Richmond and Westham at the end of the Three Forked Road. You'll have to ask, but don't ask in Richmond. More'n likely you'll see someone the other side o' town."

"I'll find it." Desmond tightened his fingers on Will's arm. "You have put yourself in great danger for me, sir. I can never repay this debt."

Will pushed him through the door. "Get on. There's no time for talk. And ride, Desmond. For God's sake ride. Sheldon and Miss Sarah are there!"

Desmond stifled a sob of relief as he nodded and walked past the stock and pillory to Will's horse. Will watched him mount. Then, with the silent movement of a panther, he finished his business, chuckling softly to himself. Child's play, this was, compared to the time he and Jim Thorpe hid from the Indians at the Delaware. Nothing had ever scared him since then, and he never again expected to come so close to losing his scalp.

He locked the door from within and slipped back into the hall to replace the key ring on the peg. Pelham's snores rattled the timbers.

. PART VII

“THE VALLEY OF DEATH—”

THE veil of years that had fallen between Sheldon and the bitter remembrance of Shipley seemed to drop away as he rode with Sarah down the Three Forked Road. On either side, the fields were green with the promise of crops: the first tender shoots of corn and wheat and farther on plowed land waiting for the tobacco slips. And then, turning a bend in the road, they came within full view of the house. Sheldon drew rein and gazed at its white brick face. The trees before it were still bare and ungraceful after the cold lashing of a long winter.

"This is Shipley—your home!" Sarah breathed ecstatically. "It's beautiful, Sheldon."

He tightened his legs on Nero and moved on at a walk. "You are not too tired to see its beauty?" he smiled. "Not even after riding all night?"

"I am too excited not to see it. And what a lovely place to come to—tired. It's so peaceful, and it seems so very far from all the misery in Williamsburg."

"I assure you, it, too, can have its misery," he told her, and though her raised eyebrows questioned him he did not explain. They rode on in silence to the end of the road and around the circle to the front steps. In the open doorway Cappy stood shielding his incredulous eyes against the sharp morning light. Robin, mouth agape, came running from the quarters, at first too astonished to speak, then giving way to an incessant stream of chatter. "'Tis Mars Sheldon. Lawd A'mighty, Mars Sheldon done come back agin. I sayd there warn't no one else sit a hoss lak he do. I sayd it de minit I sees him come round de bend."

"What's the matter with you, Robin?" Sheldon laughed. "Help Lacey with these horses. They want a hot mash." He helped Sarah to dismount.

"Yassuh, Mars Sheldon." Robin took the reins, but he didn't move. His eyes traveled the length of Sheldon's tall figure and squinted

speculatively as if he weren't quite certain he wasn't looking upon a ghost. Lacey, head drooping with fatigue, stumbled off toward the stable with Princess. He was goin' ter sleep now, and then he was goin' ter tell dese lazy niggahs how he done fit de wah down in No'folk.

"Didn't yo'all heah Mars Sheldon tell you ter take dem hosses to de bahn!" Cymon shot the question at Robin with the voice of senior authority and turned to welcome his new master. At the kitchen wall, slaves and pickaninnies stared shyly and wonderingly at Sheldon. He called a greeting to them and went slowly up the steps with Sarah into the hall.

"I suttinly is glad yuh come home, Mars Sheldon," Cappy said, closing the door behind them. "Ef I'd know'd you was comin'—"

"I didn't know it myself, until yesterday. Miss Desmond is tired, Cappy. Ask Sennie to prepare the green room for her, and bring tea and something to eat to the library. I want a fire in there, a big one."

Cappy relayed his orders and followed Sheldon into the library. "I kep de shutters closed so de sun won't fade de carpet. Miss Deborah, she was mighty pertikler 'bout dat." He flung up the windows and pushed back the shutters to let the late morning light flood the room. Well-remembered objects appeared as the shadows were dispelled: the tall mahogany clock in the corner by the door, the miniature painting of his mother on the carved walnut desk against the wall, the deep leather armchair and footstool beside the fireplace. He turned away from them and walked to the window. The sight of the river, sparkling and placid, and the small bare garden, starting beneath the window and running to the bordering box hedge, brought separate memories together in a confusion of time. He could see his mother standing over old Tim, directing the planting of innumerable bulbs, and his father—

"How have things been her'e, Cappy?" he questioned in a sudden panic to flee from the past.

"Some ob de hands run away, Mars Sheldon, but Mista Bacon, he got two of 'em back. I reckon things is not bad, 'ceptin' de house seems mighty lonely. I hopes yo' aimin' to bide a time."

"I don't think so. Not yet, Cappy. We're waiting for Mr. McKee—the gentleman who came to see me at Bellevue—"

"I 'member him." Cappy scratched his gray head. "He di'n make

no noise when he walked—”

Sheldon laughed loudly. “That’s Will, all right, isn’t it Sarah?”

“It’s the one thing I always remembered about him,” she smiled.

“Don’t ever tell him that. He hoped to make much more impression on you.”

“Oh, but he did!” she protested, and color flamed in her cheeks. “It’s only—” She could go no further, for she could see that Sheldon had guessed her unspoken words and was covering his uneasiness by drawing a chair before the hearth for her.

“Cappy,” he hurried on brusquely, “Cymon is bringing Miss Desmond’s Jessie here by wagon. I want you to keep watch for them and see that they are well taken care of. Then you are to tell Bacon that I want him to meet me here with horses after dinner.” With a gesture of dismissal to the servant, he sank down wearily into the leather armchair.

“Your room will soon be ready, Sarah.”

“I want to sit here and talk to you,” she said. Even the darkening shadows beneath her eyes could not rob them of their warmth when they came to rest on Sheldon’s face. “So often I have dreamed of seeing you in your own surroundings. I tried to imagine what your house would look like, and to visualize you in it—like this. I do not see how anything could have taken you away from this place.”

He returned her questioning gaze with a glance that seemed to go through and beyond her. Ever since he had left Shipley he had tried never to think of the tragedy that had sent him away, nor the possibility that circumstances might one day force him to return. But somehow, sitting here with Sarah who loved it for its association with him, much of the emotional strain of his return was giving way to the stirring possibility of sweeping away the past and starting afresh. For the first time since the day of the flood he could contemplate its beauty. No other house rose from the land with such casual grace as Shipley; no other land fell away into miniature valleys and rolled upward into soft, rounded hillocks as this land did. He caught himself and met Sarah’s eyes. They were puzzled, speculative. Suddenly he felt a compulsion to tell her why he had gone away. It might he thought, make it easier to face the days ahead.

She listened to his story without moving, scarcely seeming to breathe lest she break the spell which bound him as he spoke. She

could feel that the telling of it was releasing some long-pent-up fear of his memories, and her pulse was throbbing with the joy of having a part in the release. She wanted to cry out against the interruption which came when Cappy returned to tell her that her room was ready.

Sheldon stopped abruptly, and moving to her side took her hands and raised her from her chair. "I don't know what made me tell you all that," he apologized.

"I would have walked here to have you tell me if it has made you see that the future belongs to you and that you musn't bury it in the past." Her expression had a quality of such earnest appeal, and of such desperate desire to share that future with him, that he found himself wondering if he had anything to give her which could replace so much of him that was Evelyn's.

"I think it has," he answered softly. "It was a godsend coming here with you."

He pressed his lips against her hair, and felt her hands tremble in his. The scent of jasmine filled his nostrils.

When she left him to go to her room he felt that she was taking with her an indefinable tranquility. Sitting alone, he tried to recapture it, but he found that it was only the magic of her presence, like that of his mother's, which could inspire it here.

2

Christopher Desmond arrived at Shipley more dead than alive. Several hours back he had abandoned all hope of reaching his destination. Following a carter's directions, it seemed to him he had been riding through an eternity of exhaustion, dimly aware of lanes and trees; rousing himself only to ponder at the forks and cross-roads. At first, the excitement of his release and the frightening possibility of pursuit had whipped him on with a strength he had thought lost. But as soon as he felt assured that he had eluded recapture, released tension opened the flood-gates of paralyzing weakness. Swaying precariously in the saddle, soaked with the cold sweat of illness, he began to pray for the sight of Shipley. Some fiend seemed to be sticking red-hot needles in his eyes and he almost missed the sign of the Three Forked Road; but when his weary eyes beheld the

white, peaceful façade of the house, a shiver of pure joy and gratitude jerked his body erect. He put spurs to his horse and trotted down the road. Before he had gone half way he saw Sarah's slender figure racing toward him, skirts flying, and he could faintly hear her voice. Tears splashed down his dusty cheeks.

He remembered little after that until he awoke in a huge four-poster bed with Cappy standing beside him. The negro's deep voice was urging him to drink a steaming concoction that smelled of rum. Slowly his eyes focused on the room and he saw that Sarah and Sheldon stood at the foot of the bed, looking at him with long, worried faces. He smiled weakly and beckoned them to his side.

Sarah went to him, slipped her arm beneath his shoulder and pressed dry lips to his forehead. "Cappy's fixed you something to give you strength, Uncle Chris. You must drink it," she told him softly.

He nodded and began to sip from the pewter cup Cappy held to his mouth, spluttering and coughing as the rum set fire to his throat. Presently, his cheeks began to show two faint spots of color. With gathering strength, he sat up. Cappy moved aside to make way for Sheldon, and Desmond began to tell them as much as he knew of Will's coup in delivering him from the jail.

"But how did Will get by the jailor, and how did he get the keys?" Sheldon questioned.

Desmond shook his head. "I don't know. He let me out, sent me off on his horse and that's the last I saw of him."

Will himself furnished those details when he arrived about four hours later.

"But I think," he said, when he had concluded his story, "that we had better leave Mr. Desmond to rest until we move on."

"Move on?" they echoed simultaneously.

"Yes. Early tomorrow morning at the latest. We cannot safely remain this side of the Valley. If you would help us all," he told Desmond, "you will do everything possible to recover your strength. When we reach my house in Augusta we can stop for a spell, provided we hasten our journey between here and there."

"Then I *am* being pursued." Desmond's voice was bleak with despair. His false strength, induced by the rum, and his relief on reaching Shipley dissolved in a hopeless sense of futility.

"I don't think you're safe, for the present, in Virginia," Will replied.

There was a long, uneasy silence, finally broken by Desmond. "I won't have you hounded out of the Colony on my account. You have gone as far as you were going, all of you." His eyes, sweeping his listeners, were congested with weariness and despair, but there was an effort of insistence in his voice that they were forced to admire. "I'll continue alone if you can spare me a slave, Sheldon. I think I can trust you to look after Sarah."

"But that's madness, Uncle Chris. Of course you are not going on alone. You are right about Mr. McKee and Sheldon. They must stay here, but you needn't try to get rid of me!"

Will began to laugh. He laughed until his whole body shook.

"What in God's name is the matter with you?" Sheldon barked. "I don't see anything to laugh at in Mr. Desmond's preposterous decision, courageous though it is."

Finally, Will stopped, but the tears smearing the dust on his face made such a ludicrous pattern on his brown skin that the others couldn't help smiling. "I was thinkin'," he explained, "of Miss Desmond and her uncle tryin' to follow Arbuckle's trail to the Ohio."

Sheldon realized for the first time what was in Will's mind and how serious the situation had become. He must get him alone and find out what had happened before he left Williamsburg. That something unexpected had arisen, he had no doubt.

He laid a reassuring hand on Desmond's shoulder. "Don't let Will alarm you, sir. He has a perverted sense of humor."

At Sarah's insistence, Desmond settled down under the covers, but he knew that Will had not exaggerated the danger of the situation. For the first time he had a presentiment that the journey which would take him out of Virginia would be his farewell to the Colony.

When Sarah had gone to sit with her uncle soon after supper, Sheldon had his first chance to speak to Will alone. He led him into the library, motioned him to the leather armchair and closed the door. There was an amused twinkle in Will's eyes when Sheldon confronted him. "I reckon there's no need to tell me what you want to know," he said. "I thought you were goin' to bust wide open before Miss Sarah left us."

"Good God, Will, this is a serious matter. Do you realize what will happen to Desmond—to all of us—if he's taken?"

"Keep your shirt on, Sheldon. He's not goin' to get caught." The twinkle faded in a narrowed glance. "I stayed in Williamsburg as long as I dared to pick up anything that might be useful. I had a feelin' I might find some Sons o' Liberty at Jane Vobe's. Foutré was there, celebratin' I take it."

"Did you hear him say anything?" Sheldon leaned forward, pressing his arms tensely against his knees. Impatiently he watched Will fill his pipe. God's teeth, but his friend took his own time getting down to facts!

"He was sittin' at a table with Lieutenant Ross of my own company," Will went on, "so I went over and asked if I could join 'em."

A grimace of distaste crossed Sheldon's features. "Do you think that was a good idea? Drawing attention to yourself?"

"As it turned out, I reckon it was. Scott knew I'd been granted a furlough an' he asked me when I was settin' off. I told him I was aimin' to be on my way next mornin'. Then Foutré asked me where I was goin'. Augusta, I told him."

"Hell's fire, Will!" Sheldon exploded. "You know you can't trust Foutré out of your sight. If he has any suspicions—"

Will smiled. "He has none of me. Anyhow, I couldn't say otherwise: I'd told Captain Sayres I was goin' home, an' Scott had a knowin' eye on me."

"Well, go on."

"'You Valley men are good fighters,' Ross says, an' then Foutré lets loose."

"I agree with that," he says. 'An' it wouldn't be a bad idea to let 'em stay in the Valley and stamp out the Loyalists there.' Then I told him that in my part o' the Valley there weren't no Loyalists. We were all patriots to the bone marrow. He begins to tell me about rovin' bands o' Tory cavalry in Augusta that are leading Indian attacks on settlers. I told him I hadn't heard of 'em, but I'd like to meet 'em. 'So would I,' says he. 'But the first thing I'd like to do is to make these thick-skulled gentlemen on the Committee o' Safety see that they're not accomplishin' anything by sending the Tories to the interior. They're goin' to get to the enemy sooner or later,' says he, 'an' they ought to be kept in jail where they belong.' 'There's a lot

o' sense in that,' says I, an' then after a while I said I had to be goin' an' wished 'em good night." He paused, and resting his head against the back of the chair, stared at the ceiling. "Something else happened," he said thoughtfully. "I went to Singleton's to hire a horse. It was after midnight by then, and Singleton was just locking up. I told him my horse was lame and I wanted to be in Richmond early in the mornin'. He looked at me a long time then he said, 'You were here yesterday with Sheldon Hilliard and Miss Desmond.' 'Yes, I was,' I said, 'and an unnecessary delay it proved to be. I'd be a third o' the way home, by now. On furlough,' says I, 'an' ready for it after a solid year in the army.' 'Well,' says he, 'do you know where Miss Desmond might be? She left here with Sheldon Hilliard.' "

"What did you say, Will?" Sheldon felt a pulse throbbing in his stomach.

"I told him the last I heard, you were takin' her home to Hanover. Then he tells me that a Miss Buford was inquiren' for her and also for you. An' it wasn't a half hour later before Miss Buford was back with Foutré askin' some more questions."

"Miss Buford?" Sheldon smiled, but Will could see that there was no humor in the smile.

"You know her?" he asked.

Sheldon nodded and rose from his chair. Moving to the hearth he leaned against the mantel and stared into the flames. No one but Will, innocent of the deeper significance of the news he brought, could have made him believe that Evelyn would betray him, however impelling her patriotic conscience. Were he in any sense a traitor to the cause of liberty, he would expect nothing else. But surely she knew that he would not fight the Tories with one hand and succor them with the other. Desmond's case was as much an exception as that of Matthew Phripp or any of the other Norfolk Tories whom the Committee of Safety themselves had exonerated.

"You are right, Will," he said at length. "There is no doubt that we must move on in the morning. We will go as far as possible with the coach for Mr. Desmond's sake. Let's hope he can ride by then."

"What about Singleton's horse?"

"I'll get Lacey to return it. He can be unbelievably stupid when questioned. He will, perhaps, have come from the Old City Tavern in Richmond." Sheldon swung around to face Will. "I don't mind now

how far this takes us. I'm sick of the Tidewater."

"I've been waitin' to hear you say that—for a long time," and Will smiled.

3

SPRING lengthened into summer and the hot summer days into the blessed cool of autumn. With Will's crops in, there was little to do on the land now, and the Webb men and George Webb's wife, who had come to help him, went back to their own farm across the Valley on the South River. It had been a glorious period of peace and enlightenment for Sheldon, who stood with Will and Sarah on the long porch recently added to the enlarged log house.

"Do the neighbors always help each other like this?" he asked, wondering at the unsolicited generosity of the tall, shy Webb men with the strange manner of speech, and Melancy Webb, who seemed almost as strong as the men.

"They're kin," Will explained. "When I go away, they come here once a month to see Tom hasn't let the wolves eat my hogs and sheep."

Sheldon never realized before how little he knew about Will. Whenever he had visualized him back in the Valley on his own land, his vision had been of a pioneer, plowing and planting and harvesting crops alone, as self-sufficient and untouched by the softening influence of Tidewater refinement as any frontier settler. He never thought about Will's nephew, a reedy, hard-muscled boy with thoughtful brown eyes and a thick shock of straw-colored hair. Will had explained Tom's presence in two brief sentences. "My brother left him here when he set out to follow Boone's Trace to Kentucky. He never came back, so Tom stayed with me." He never explained what happened to Tom's mother. That he had a deep affection for the soft-spoken youth was evident in his gentle reproaches for mistakes and his rough praise for work well done. Tom had labored as hard and constantly as Will and Sheldon in felling trees and splitting logs to build the two additions at either side of the two-room log house, while the Webbs were busy in the fields. He did the milking and cut wood for the fires on cold spring nights, and peeled the vegetables

for Sarah who had taken over the cooking under the practical direction of Melancy. Together they ground corn, taking turns with the hand mill, and gritted hominy.

While Will and Sheldon sheared the sheep, Sarah spent laborious hours at the loom, trying to remember Melancy's direction for weaving linsey-woolsey. Will rebelled against her working, and cursed himself for not having allowed Jessie to come with them. "It's not fittin' for you!" he protested daily, but he couldn't deny that Sarah seemed happier. And when she insisted that Jessie would have usurped all her duties, making her miserably idle, he gave way. "I feel that I'm part of a new world, Will, and it's exciting. It makes me feel useful for the first time in my life."

Desmond had weathered the journey better than any of them had expected, though he was still unable to lend a hand with any of the work. Brief walks with Sarah in the afternoons taxed the limit of his strength and for the rest of the day he would sit on the porch, wrapped in his greatcoat, finding endless pleasure in the winding ribbon of changing colors that was the North River, and, across the undulating floor of the Valley, the towering line of the Blue Ridge turning purple with the close of evening. In the summer-time, unable to endure the heat of day and the swarms of deer flies and midges, he would watch his valley from the window in the living room, and sometimes when he seemed to be dreaming with open eyes of the rolling fields of Hanover, Sheldon would sit with him and they would discuss the future of this country to which circumstances had led them. They were sitting together when an express on his way to Fincastle brought them news of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Will had met the express in the bottom land where the trail ran through, paralleling the river, and had come galloping back to the house yelling the news at the top of his lungs.

"We've shown 'em what we think of 'em," he cried, eyes alight, face as eager as a boy's as he strode into the house. And then, seeing that the news had shocked Desmond, he tried to force back the thrilling surge of excitement that had brought him home. Sheldon made no effort to conceal his elation, and when Desmond, in a voice of weary resignation, said that it was perhaps for the best, their boisterous exultation broke out afresh and brought Sarah hurrying from the kitchen with Tom behind her. When they told her of the

Declaration, she dropped to the floor beside Desmond and took his hand in hers. He was staring across the mountain with an incredulous, far-seeing gaze. "So many things have changed for us, Uncle Chris. We must accept this, too."

He nodded vaguely.

Sheldon sat down beside him. He tried to choose his words carefully, eager not to offend this man who had suffered enough at the hands of the patriots. "Mr. Desmond, the Colony treated you badly, but a young country is bound to make mistakes. I expect it will make many more and people and ideals will have to be sacrificed to experience. But you can see here, better than in the Tidewater, that it could not go on under the monarchical system. Can you imagine, for instance, the King in London trying to govern people like the Webbs, or the Ministry having any sympathy with their problems?" He felt as if he were talking to a deaf man, but he went on, following Desmond's eyes to the mountains. "As the country moves westward, it will only become more complicated. Can't you see it was destined to end sometime and that it is better for the government to grow with the expansion of the Colonies?"

"I can only feel," Desmond answered in a toneless voice, "that I live in a country that has defied my sovereign. But I can understand your reasoning. The Colonies have been a thorn in the side of Britain."

"A thorn of gold, sir," Sheldon replied with sudden anger.

The uncomfortable silence which followed was broken by Will. "There is further news which you will be glad to hear, Sheldon. Patrick Henry's been made Governor. He took the oath of office on the fifth of July."

"There, sir!" Sheldon cried, fixing Desmond with a look of triumph. "One wrong has been redressed. No one in the Colony has been treated more shabbily than Colonel Henry by the Committee of Safety. Yet, when they need a leader for their new democracy, they turn back to him and he is big enough to forget, or at least to forgive, their affronts."

Desmond regarded him with faint sarcasm. "You are suggesting that I should do the same thing? Forgive their condemnation of me and their theft of my property?"

"No. I only ask you to believe that some day that wrong will also be righted and your property restored to you."

"Sheldon may be right, Uncle Chris," Sarah said gently. Desmond's expression softened at her beseeching smile and then his eyes slid to Sheldon. He had the pioneer's strength, this lad, and the vision of the pioneer. He was never meant for a Tidewater dandy. Though their manners were his and he wore their clothes with befitting elegance, the rough buckskins and fringed hunting shirt marked him for his true mission. As the western settlements grew, and the Indian menace retreated before the increasing strength of the pioneers, the frontier would need men like Sheldon who could preserve the traditions of a refined civilization with the same balanced judgment with which they fought.

There was a persuasiveness about the lad that was difficult to resist, particularly when one knew that his conception of justice was impartial enough to lead him into taking such a risk as this flight had been. For example, Sheldon must see as clearly as he did that he held Sarah's heart within his large brown hands, and that her opinion was being recast in the mould of his. In spite of the trial, and its consequences, there was no doubt that she had found a consuming happiness in this new domain which she ruled with a gentle and possessive hand. More than once he suspected that she thought of it as hers and Sheldon's, and that Tom and Will and he himself were a small part of her magic world. If Sheldon was aware of this he refused to show it, save for a quick, questioning smile when he caught Sarah's eyes on him. It amused Desmond that she had no wish to conceal her love for Sheldon, when she had practiced indifference so assiduously on Paul Drinkwater. He wondered at the understanding that had grown out of the long evenings when, together, they explored the woods beyond the farm, and out of the still nights when they sat on the long porch watching the moon spread a silver mantle over the valley and set the river to shining like a broad belt of white fire. For on those nights the land was touched by an unearthly hand that drew the beholders into its enchanting pattern.

When Desmond's thoughts returned to the room, he found that his mood had thrown the others into silence. He searched their faces, one by one. In Will's was a new impatience replacing the settled contentment of working his land again; in Tom's an expression plainly puzzled, as if this talk of happenings beyond the Blue Ridge put questions to his imagination. In Sarah's face he thought he saw a lurking

fear that Will's message might send Sheldon back along the path they had come; and when he looked at Sheldon, he saw that her fear had some foundation. He was staring at the empty hearth in deep reflection. With eyebrows closely knit and chin resting on his folded hands, he seemed to be disturbed by a problem.

Desmond stirred uneasily, tightening his grip on Sarah's hand. His voice, when he spoke, had a metallic ring. "Do you regret your enforced exile, Sheldon?"

Shaken from his reverie, Sheldon smiled apologetically. "I made up my mind about you as I have had to do about many things, with nothing but my own judgment to guide me, and I reckon I have made many mistakes, but I do not count this as one of them." His expression grew sober again, almost remote. "No, sir, I do not regret my enforced exile, nor the cause of it. The Colonies are something more to me than the Tidewater, and have been ever since Clen Montague and I sat on our horses at the top of Rockfish Gap and saw the Valley for the first time. It's the new land I have my heart set on."

Spring returned to the Valley, and with it discomfiting reports of Indian uprisings. All along the frontier, from Detroit to Cumberland Gap, murderous bands of Cherokees, Delawares and Wyandottes swooped down upon the settlements, leaving behind them a trail of blood and devastation and a growing body of settlers vowed to vengeance. The fire-arms that cut this swath bore the markings of the white man. It began to look as if the British were succeeding in their determined purpose to encourage their red-skinned allies to make a mass attack against the established forts. A trapper, passing through Staunton, brought news, pregnant with foreboding, from Captain Arbuckle. Cornstalk, visiting him at Point Pleasant where Arbuckle commanded the post, informed him that with the exception of himself and the Shawnees, all the nations had joined the English; and that unless helped by the whites "he and his warriors would have to swim with the stream." Arbuckle had decided that the wisest policy was to hold Cornstalk and his companions as hostages for the good conduct of the Shawnees. It was only a day after this meeting that a hunter named Gilmore was killed by two Indians hiding in the weeds on the bank of the Kanawha. When the dead body was brought to the fort, neither Captain Arbuckle nor Captain Stuart

had been able to prevent their men, headed by Captain Hall, from killing Cornstalk and the hostages. Even Cornstalk's son, who had come to stand at his father's side, was cut down in cold blood. "You can count the Shawnees against you, now, since they've a mind for vengeance," the trapper concluded, and his words echoed up and down the Valley.

Will and Tom heard it direct from Sampson Mathews when they took horses to Staunton to trade for salt. The three men were sitting at a table in the tap-room of Mathews' Ordinary on a frosty morning in April. "I mind when you came here with the lad from the Tidewater after Dunmore's War," Mathews recalled. "You had much to say against the Governor."

"Aye, an' I repeat it!" Will replied heatedly.

"The Tory menace has spread to the West an' I reckon the Legislature had better let the militia stay here. There's no good in sendin' 'em east when their heads are full o' the dangers they're leavin' their families to face. Men fight best when they're protectin' their own." Mathews filled a long-stemmed clay pipe, pressing the tobacco down with a broad, grimy thumb. "December, we chose officers to raise two companies o' regulars. John Syme and William Christian are most likely the best men we got. They were elected Captain and Second Lieutenant, and between 'em they've drummed up forty men."

"What's the Legislature?" Will asked.

"Where've you been?" Mathews chuckled. "The Legislature's replaced the Convention. We got a State Constitution now an' can elect senators. Reckon you don't know West Augusta's a separate district, either. Things is changin' around here, Will. The frontier's movin' right outa sight. Have you heard about George Rogers Clark?"

"No. Ain't heard about anything but the Declaration o' Independence an' Patrick Henry bein' Governor."

"Well, it seems Clark came over Boone's Trace to Virginia to ask the Council to accept Kentucky as a county and give the settlers five hundred pounds o' powder to defend themselves against the Indians. That was in August last year. It seems the Council was willin' to lend 'em the powder if Clark would take it back at his own expense. There was some argument back an' forth, an' finally Clark told 'em a country not worth defendin' wasn't worth havin'. That tipped their wigs for 'em an' they sent the powder to Pittsburgh

for Clark to pick up an' take to Kentucky. He gave Governor Henry an earful about the Tories, so he told Israel Bell on his way back. Gabriel Jones, who came with him as far as Botetourt, went back to Holston to join the militia fightin' the Cherokees."

"How happens I didn't hear about the militia bein' formed?" Will asked.

"We knew you were here on furlough, Will. Haven't you had enough fightin' for a spell?"

"Not so's I wouldn't join the militia when an Indian shows his stinkin' red face."

"Well, they're showin' 'em, but they ain't much worse than the Tories. There're bands of 'em between here and the Alleghenies and down to the Holston been stealin' horses and robbin' and murderin' the settlers."

Will rubbed his chin. "I reckoned when I left Williamsburg I'd not be goin' back there."

"Seems to me you're more useful here, Will. You know the Valley better'n most. The Committee of Safety's sent this Captain Foutré to recruit a company o' militia an' rout out the Loyalists in this part of the country. Seems Foutré's already got his mind on a couple. Now if you wanted to go along with 'em, I reckon he'd take you as guide. I don't know why the Committee didn't let Syme or Christian go after 'em. I reckon Foutré talked 'em into it. He seems to have some right strong ideas about what he's goin' to do. He says Colonel Campbell can rid the southwest of 'em, an' he'll do it here in six months."

"This Foutré—is he here, Sam?" Will's face betrayed no emotion save in the movement of his tense cheek muscles.

"He's in Staunton. Out lookin' over the militia, so he said. But he's comin' back here tomorrow. He says he's goin' to get the Cryders and Bill Hinton, an' he's lookin' for them two Tories he's traced as far as Rockfish Gap."

"Did he say who they were?" Will asked, bringing out his pipe and filling it slowly.

"No, he didn't say that I can remember. Only that one of 'em broke out o' the jail in Williamsburg, an' that the jailer gave him a good description of the man who freed the Tory. It seems this fellow tied the jailor to a chair—" His short upper lip lifted in a sour

smile. "I'd admire to see a meeting between Foutré and this fellow—the other passed through here some time ago, he thinks."

"They ought to get another 'jailor,'" Will commented, and rising from his chair, threw back his head and stretched out his arms. "I bin sittin' here too long, Sam. Time I was startin' on my way." He picked up his hat and slapped Tom between the shoulder blades. "Come on, young fella. We got a long ride ahead of us."

"Goin' back to your farm, Will?" Mathews followed them to the door.

Will's eyes narrowed slightly. He'd give a lot to know just how much Foutré had told Mathews, and why he, himself, hadn't had the sense to realize that Foutré would fit the jailer's description to the man he met in Jane Vobe's. "No," he answered in his slow, easy drawl. "I'm thinkin' o' stoppin' at Webb's. Likely he might be glad of another hand for a spell, an' I can repay him for helpin' me out last spring."

He and Tom mounted their horses and gathered up the reins of the pack-horses.

"When are you comin' back, Will? If Foutré wants you as guide—"

Will jerked his restive horse to a standstill. "Reckon I'd rather do my fightin' with Syme. I don't put much store by these Tidewater fellows when they come to fightin' out o' their own territory." A quick smile and sly wink at Mathews brought a rapid response from the innkeeper who winked back and accepted Will's implication that all Valley men thought alike about the Tidewater fighter.

"Uncle Will, we've got our crops to tend, an' iffen—"

"If," Will corrected gently. "'Tisn't that I don't hold with that manner o' talkin', Tom, but it marks you for a lad without learnin', and I aim to teach you all I know. Which isn't much," he added with a grin.

"I know, Uncle Will. I want to talk like you. *If* we don't set out the rest of the tobacco—"

"You're goin' to set it out, Tom, and tend the other crops and the hogs and sheep, and remember all the things I do when I'm there. An' if you have trouble, the Webbs 'll help. You and Sheldon an' I have done the most o' the work already—"

Tom's face screwed up in a look of confusion. His eyes on Will's

pleaded for explanation.

The explanation was slow in coming, for Will's mind was busy with a thought that had occurred to him for the first time. "I bin thinkin', Tom. How old are you?"

"Sixteen," Tom answered, his curiosity mounting.

"I reckon you ain't too young to get married if you want a woman to take care of you."

"I don't want a woman," Tom asserted.

"She'd cook for you, and keep you warm o' nights, an' save you from bein' lonely. An' you're man enough, now, to keep a wife, Tom."

"I don't want a woman," Tom repeated fiercely.

"Well, if you change your mind, I reckon Nancy Webb might favor you. I'm goin' to Kentucky, an' it'll be mighty lonesome for you. There are times a woman does a man good, Tom, an' you musn't set your mind against marryin'."

"You aren't married," Tom observed stoutly.

Will's face lengthened and his eyes looked out over the road, unseeing. That was just it. He wasn't married and he wanted to be. If he could tell Tom of the nights he had lain in his bed thinking of Sarah in the room he and Sheldon had built for her, and of how his mind tormented him with visions of her lying beside him with her auburn head pillowed on his arm; or of the hours of the day that he watched her at her loom, weaving against the framed sunlight of the window, her hands caressing the woolen strands, and the sapphire pendant, which she always wore, burning with myriad reflections. But he couldn't tell him. He couldn't tell anyone, least of all Sarah, who had chosen Sheldon above all men. Finally, he said, "That's why I say you shouldn't set your mind against it, Tom." And after a pause, he added, irrelevantly, "We're not stopping at Webb's. When I've gone, if anyone asks you where I am, you tell them I'm huntin'."

"Can't I go with you, Uncle Will? If I'm old enough to get married like you said, I could hunt with you."

"Next time, I'll take you. Not this time."

Tom scowled in dejected silence. For a time, nothing but the quick beat of the horses' hooves sounded on the clear air. "Where are Mr. Desmond and Miss Sarah going?" he asked in a dark voice.

"With me," Will replied. "When I come back, I'll tell you all about it, if you don't ask me questions now."

"Can I ask you one more question, Uncle Will?" The road was becoming a blur before Tom's eyes, and he struggled with a hard lump in his throat.

"One more," Will agreed, "if it hasn't to do with the Desmonds."

"When are you coming back?"

"I can't answer that even to myself, Tom." Resting his horse from its steady jog-trot, Will reined it in to a walk. "If it should happen I don't come back—because I find me some land out there I like better'n this," he added, "my farm belongs to you."

Tom searched his uncle's face with quick fearful glances. His hands felt cold and damp on the supple reins. The mountains he knew so well from other trips seemed suddenly oppressive and ominous, filled with the mysterious, lurking dangers of the other more westerly mountains where Will was going.

There was no more talk between them except of the land and the weather which they discussed in brief, spasmodic observations after long silences filled with thoughts close to the hearts of both.

They arrived at the farm too late for Will to tell of his news and his decision that night. He climbed the stairs softly to the room above, and Tom followed him, too tired to take off his clothes. Desmond snored heavily in the room below and hadn't wakened at their coming. Above, Sheldon stirred in his bed next to the wall, but slept on. Before daylight broke, Will gave way to the aching fatigue of back and legs and let himself sink into a dreamless sleep.

Preparations for the departure went forward next morning and continued through the afternoon: salt, powder, lead and grain, and the woolen garments Sarah had woven were packed in leather bags, ready to load onto the pack-horses. There was little left of the fine clothes she had taken to Norfolk. Her silks and satins were long since threadbare and she had reluctantly discarded them. Of the luxurious days, nothing remained but the sapphire pendant which she now wore in the hollow between her breasts, concealed by the coarse cotton bodice of her dress. In case of need, Will had carefully packed two bottles of rum and whiskey. And all the time beneath the work of the four—Sarah, Tom, Will and Sheldon—ran an under-current of unspoken fear, never for themselves, but for the others and for Christopher Desmond, who had accepted the news with

speechless understanding. Sheldon and Will did all that persuasion could do, each to let the other stay back, but tacitly they agreed that one knowing man was not enough to guide the Desmonds with any security over the mountains. Sarah's unspoken fears were calmed with assurances that somewhere along the way they would meet other travelers following the Trace, for the way they were going was the known way: down the Valley and over the ridge into the waters of the Holston, keeping southwest to the great Cumberland Gap; then the upward turn of the journey between the waters of the Ohio, bearing northwest toward Harrodsburg at Flat Lick. The way was in Will's mind; etched there by numberless accounts of the faint Trace unfolding through perilous mountain passes to the Great Meadow.

The following morning Tom watched the party set off. Sarah kissed him goodbye, leaving the imprint of her warm lips on his heart long after his mouth had forgotten their touch. In their working together he had found her unlike the Webb women or any others he knew from the farms in the Valley. She would laugh with him and tell him stories of the Tidewater: of the great houses where gentlemen and ladies in fine silks and velvets, with jewels in slippers and knee buckles and in high, powdered wigs danced the minuet in brilliantly lit rooms. And when he wanted to know what the minuet was, she showed him, taking his work-hardened hand in hers and teaching him to present his leg in a deep bow. He would have had her stay on forever, brightening the days of his Valley life with exciting tales of her strangely beautiful world. But he knew as certainly as she was disappearing down the hill out of his sight, that their magic flights across the Blue Ridge together had forever come to an end.

4

THE days passed in slow succession as the little party moved forward, threading its way down the Shenandoah Valley, to mount the Blue Ridge in weary file on the way to Roanoke: down into the Valley again and then the westward turning to the Holston. Sometimes they stopped at cabin clearings where Sarah prepared the corn pone they ate with the game Sheldon and Will killed. Then the men would cut

pine boughs, spreading their blankets over some of them for sleeping, and with others, making a shelter for Sarah.

Thus the days passed into nights, the weary way marked by rain and wind, sun and calm, and by a mounting foreboding of disaster, for it became obvious that Desmond could not stand the journey much longer. His stomach rebelled at the cornmeal cakes and game which furnished their only food and while they ate he would sit with his head turned away from them. After he was helped onto his horse in the morning, he would slump apathetically in the saddle, seeming to have gathered no rest from his sleep of the night before.

In the mountain meadows, where the road permitted, Sheldon rode by Sarah's side, and they spoke in whispered words of Desmond, riding behind Will who led the way.

"If we could only stop and build a cabin for ourselves like those others," Sarah said. "Perhaps a few days' rest would give him strength enough to go on until we reach Black's Fort."

"That's true," Sheldon answered. "But it wouldn't be safe, Sarah. With the Indians rising against the settlers, we need the protection of a fort near by."

"He has eaten nothing in the last week, and it seems such an effort for him to speak." Now her face expressed all her unspoken concern, and her apprehension seemed to draw heavily from the physical strength that Sheldon and Will had continually wondered at. From her cheek bones, the skin drew down in an unfamiliar tautness, the rounded softness gone; and in spite of the hooded cape which she wore, sun and wind burned her face and drew sharp lines across her forehead. From the beginning, Sheldon had found it almost impossible to reconcile her patience and her endurance and her willingness to face the rigors of the frontier with the impression she had created in her Tidewater surroundings. Then he had thought her spoiled, wilful, dependent upon comfort.

Now, her only dependence seemed to be on him and, in a sense, during the long journey, on Will, as if she were drawing physical strength from them both. Her moods followed Sheldon's; her happiness, which shone so plainly in her eyes, came from attentions he paid her and the sympathetic glances that passed between them. When she admitted fatigue and he forced her gently to sit down and rest, she acquiesced eagerly at the pressure of his hands against her

shoulders, content to let her eyes follow him at his work. He felt, when they were together, that her eyes were never off him, and while at first he resented this, gradually he came to feel strength in her dependence.

Then he realized how Evelyn, in some strange way, had taken from that strength; how his sense that her judgment was superior to his, even while he resisted it, how he looked to her for approval and acceptance—this raising of her mind and her importance above his—had suppressed the qualities in him that Sarah drew forth. He knew that Sarah would seek strength and resolution from him as long as he would give it. Though no hint that this was so had ever passed her lips, he felt her unspoken admission more and more as the strange new land unfolded before them.

Her eyes had been puzzling over the out-cropping of reddish-gray rock and the earthy mounds which Will had said were Indian burying places. Laurel and oak and pine shadowed their way, crimson sumac brushed them as they passed, but her eyes kept to the stranger forms of rock and earth. Behind them flowed the south fork of the Holston; before them, where the Clinch Mountains rose green and solid and seemingly impassable, the north fork. But they would reach Black's Fort before they came to the mountains.

5

AFTER many days, they saw the walls of the Fort where the land was green and broad and had a richer texture than the reddish earth behind them, and their faces brightened with relief. Within them all rose a proud, triumphant thrill common to the heart of every pioneer at the end of each stage of a journey until the way was forever cleared of danger.

A cry of pleasure and excitement broke from the inhabitants of the little walled town at their arrival. Here was fresh news of the outside world, more hands for protection. Activity stopped and the people crowded round them; the women and children helped Sarah from her horse, supporting her weariness with strong arms; the men helped Desmond and asked Will and Sheldon questions which they put off with tired smiles. "If you let us rest and eat, we will tell you

all we know," Will said. "Our minds and bodies are numb with the long way we've come, and"—he nodded toward Desmond—"he must have care. He is very weak."

"Looks like he mought die," a young lad observed lugubriously. "Better let my ma give him herb brew."

They put them in the cabin of a family named Leary, Sarah in a room above that she reached by a narrow ladder, and Sheldon and Will below, with bearskins to lie on. Michael Leary and his wife gave up their bed opposite the broad fireplace to Desmond, when they saw he could not climb the ladder. The Leary women—the wife and two daughters—took charge of Sarah and her uncle. On noiseless moccasined feet they moved about the cabin. They made an herb tea, baked corn pone, and cut hunks of meat from a freshly cooked turkey. Sheldon and Will unburdened the pack-horses, and returning to the cabin, stretched out on the bearskins and watched the women work. At first their muscles would not relax. They could still feel the throbbing and twitching throughout their bodies.

Children, standing outside, peered in curiously through the cabin doorway. The boys were dressed in fringed hunting shirts and buckskin trousers; the girls, like the women, wore linsey jackets and skirts, and the clothes of all were grimy and torn, or carelessly patched. But there was a confidence and sturdiness about the children, as there was about their parents, that gave vicarious strength to the new arrivals, after they had broken their first paralyzing fatigue.

"We came in too great haste," Will explained to the men who came back later in the day to hear their story. "The only days we rested were back in the Valley and we had a sick man to watch over then, so we slept little."

One of the men, named George Shaw, spoke up. "Why did you come so quickly?"

"Because of the woman and her uncle," Will said, not willing to confess the truth about their flight. "They were afraid of tarrying in the wilderness."

"But there are forts along the way you came," Michael Leary said.

"Aye, but they were restless to come here."

"An' it sickened the woman-person's uncle. 'Twas not good sense."

"There was another came here in such haste," George Shaw recalled. "Beaten he was by the journey and a-scared lookin', but set as a beaver on goin' to Kentucky. An' all by himself, he was, in clothes of a dark stuff."

"Who was he?" Sheldon asked, more out of desire to turn the conversation from themselves than out of curiosity.

"Can't rightly recollect." Shaw frowned and scratched his head.

"Can you, Harry?" he asked of a third man.

"Name of Norris, as I remember," Harry replied.

Sheldon, sitting on the bearskin against the wall, jerked upright. "Norris! Is that the name you said? Did he say where he was going? To one of the big forts?"

"He asked the way to Harrod's Fort."

With the hearing of such news, Sheldon felt his strength returning, borne on the tide of resolution. He wanted to tell Desmond, to rouse him from his exhausted sleep, but the news would only excite him. In a day or two perhaps he could tell him how their journey had taken on a new and even stronger significance. A prayer began in Sheldon's mind that Tom Norris would reach Harrod's Fort safely, and there be preserved till the day they came to reckon with him.

"'Tis the damned Tories we've a right to fear more'n the regulars," Leary was crying, beating his fist on his knee, when Sheldon caught up with the conversation of the men. "You ask Jake Lovell. He says a British regular can't shoot a horse at ten yards, but these Tories, they're trained to shoot same as we are. Some of 'em fought in the French and Indian wars. The British couldn't get to the forts withouten they had the Tories for guides. Up North, up around Detroit where Jake Lovell's been, he says the Tories e'en show the regulars how to keep from starvin' and freezin' to death. They know the art o' stirrin' up the Indians, damn their flea-bitten souls. I'd admire to see the lot of 'em put to the tortures their red disciples think up, an' I'd ne'er shed a tear for a single one!" There was a light cold as steel in Leary's gray eyes and a tension of every muscle in his middle-aged frame.

"It mought be our bounden duty to go out against the red devils," Harry said, "but I cannot see I've a right to go out an' leave my own family in danger." The shock of bright red hair that fell across

his brow with the emphatic jerk of his head, reminded Sheldon of Clen. And this boy was little older than Clen was when he was killed.

"Clark's got powder for Kentucky," Will said, his voice tense, reflecting theirs. "I reckon he showed the Convention that the war's got to be won out here as well as in the east."

"Patrick Henry would know that, Will. I doubt Clark had to argue very hard with him to rouse his sympathy. They'll be recruitin' more men for the Holston settlements," said Sheldon.

"Aye, if Colonel Campbell has his way," Leary replied. "But 'tis no easy matter, recruitin' militia. The Bedford County Companies refused to serve. I mind they wanted to stay at home to protect their own. Some says stories of Indian murders turned their blood to water. All is, can you blame them? If the Tories start raidin' from Black Lick up the valley, they've a mind to do their own forming."

For a long time the men sat talking. The two Leary girls moved like shadows about them, doing their mother's bidding till Nancy said, "'Tis fittin' we leave the men folks to theirselves for a spell," and withdrew out into the open.

"There's been injustice done to Tories who didn't deserve it, all the same." Sheldon carried on the thread of their talk, feeling them out.

"I reckon there has," Leary conceded, "but I ain't seen a Tory yet fittin' to spit on."

"It was Dunmore's hand turned the Tories to dealing with the Indians," Sheldon maintained, in a voice that made no effort to conceal his hatred of the late Royal Governor. "He and his damned Major Conolly promising them everything from land to rum if they would rise against the settlers."

The others nodded assent. "In Dunmore's war I reckon 'twas Dunmore's own devils we were fighting. Leastwise, there's many of us think he stirred 'em up a-purpose to keep the settlers out o' the West," George Shaw declared bitterly.

Sheldon's brows lifted in quick interest. "You were there, too! Will and I were in Captain Stuart's company."

They fell to reminiscing about Point Pleasant, and then talk shifted to the war in the east. Leary said a deserter from Colonel Washington's army on Long Island had brought them news of the hideous

privations suffered by the men. "Millers took flour to Howe's men, when they told Colonel Washington they had none. They drove horses to the British lines. Tories went like spies into the patriot camps, stealin' powder from their magazines, and salt; an' others went like peddlers, tellin' the patriots not to enlist, and scarin' them with tales o' the Cossacks and Hessians—how they'd torture their babes and womenfolk like the Indians did."

It was late afternoon before they had exhausted their store of knowledge and rumor; Will and Sheldon exchanged details of the fighting at Norfolk and Hampton for news of the east and of the frontier which had eluded them since their flight from Williamsburg.

Sarah, coming from her room to sit beside Desmond, wondered at the tenacity of these fort men who could make their homes in the wilderness, cut off from the life they were discussing almost as if they were eye-witnesses of the events. Their convictions, she thought, must be unbreakable. Having turned their eyes westward, in that direction would they always look to their future.

Will had gone out with the men to see to the horses, when Sheldon told Sarah the news of Norris. She dropped down on the bearskin beside him, a glow of deep satisfaction springing into her eyes. "Then we will go there—to Harrod's Fort, Sheldon—as soon as Uncle Chris is strong enough to travel again."

"I'm afraid that will be many days."

They looked simultaneously at Desmond, who had slept continuously since their arrival. His pallid face was that of an old man.

It was nearing time for the evening meal, and Nancy was preparing vegetables gathered from the patch outside the fort; a fowl was already boiling in the iron kettle over the fireplace. The scene of simplicity, life reduced to the merest essentials, struck a chord of contentment in Sheldon. Here were these people, living under constant fear of danger, forcing that fear, during their daily work, to the remotest corners of their minds, yet keeping it there as an antidote against shock or surprise. The women who busied themselves in the quadrangle within the fort walls, filling their piggins from the spring, pounding their corn in the common mortar, were no less industrious than the men who mended plows, worked the vegetable patches, and went out from the fort to shoot game for the iron kettles. And there was a sense of oneness about their various jobs, when at the close of

day they converged into the pattern of cooperative life being woven within the fort's walls. Sarah felt it, too, but more, Sheldon thought, as a curious and interesting contrast to Tidewater life. He did not sense in her any sympathetic response to the simplicity, but only wonder that these people could so live and be happy. It made him realize even more the depth of her devotion to Desmond that she would travel farther into the wilderness, where even these essentials might come to seem luxurious; almost to the westernmost limits of the frontier, in search of Norris. Another thought came to him which he did not so willingly acknowledge: that for some reason she loved him enough to put down fear and accept this simplicity, to turn whole-heartedly toward their purpose because they would seek to achieve it together.

He slipped his hand over hers, doubling her fingers within his in a gentle grip. "Your courage has meant much to us all, Sarah," he said. He did not realize the excitement his words stirred within her until she drew closer to him, smiling, speechless. The ecstatic throbbing of her pulse stilled all sense of time and place. Didn't he know that she would go always where he went, giving him strength from the infinite depths of her faith and love? She would banish the hateful memories from Shipley or make a home for him in the wilderness if only he would let her.

Nancy Leary came back from the spring humming a tune. Reluctantly Sarah slipped her hand from Sheldon's, and they rose from their place against the wall. When the woman's narrow back bent over the iron kettle Sarah turned her face up to his and waited breathlessly for the touch of his lips. It came slowly, flooding her with a hot, turbulent current that made her thighs and breasts heavy with indescribable longing and started the roaring of a thousand seashells in her ears. The briefness of his kiss spanned a gulf of boredom and misery and despair, and left her clinging to him. She would make his body tremble against hers and force that cool detachment from his green eyes. He *must* love her and yet he had kissed her as he might have kissed a child who had suffered much without complaining and she—she had asked for it as if she had spoken the words. If only he could be made to feel the violent tremor of excitement that she felt at his touch so that when he drove her to this frenzy of longing he himself could not stand aloof from it.

Nancy Leary's voice broke into her thoughts. "Iffen you want fer to cut up the turnips there's a knife hangin' yonder." She nodded to a neat row of cooking utensils without taking her eyes from the boiling fowl in the kettle.

With a lingering, searching glance that hovered over every feature of his face and drew a slow smile from him, Sarah moved away from Sheldon's side.

In the days that followed, Desmond seemed to recover much of his strength, though he still kept to his bed, following the Leary women with his eyes as they went silently about their chores. Regularly, one or another of them would pause in her work to give him herb tea, or turkey, or corn pone soaked in broth.

"You need victuals for strength," they told him, standing by until he commenced to eat.

Sometimes Nancy would look at him from a corner of the room as if measuring his improvement against some unseen standard, but in general, the solicitude of these hardy women took no demonstrative form. On the frontier, sickness was something to be expected and to be cured without ceremony.

After the evening meal, the Learys went out to the fort square to visit with their neighbors. Though the first warmth of spring was in the air, Sarah sat before the fire, rocking gently in the low hickory chair. Will, sitting on the floor in the shadows of the room with his back to the wall, talked in a low voice about the fort people, but his eyes kept straying to Sarah, trying to understand the contentment that had come suddenly, in the last two days, into her whole expression.

If Sheldon was aware of it, he gave no sign. His attention seemed to be all for Desmond whom he drew into their quiet conversation. He felt now that the time had come to tell him of Tom Norris, hoping the knowledge would give him renewed incentive to get well. But he was not wholly prepared for the effect of his words.

Desmond raised himself on his elbows and stared long at Sheldon before he spoke. "We must start for Fort Harrod tomorrow. We'll never find Norris if he heads for the Tory forts in the North." The rapidly deepening flush in his cheeks, so long pallid, alarmed Sheldon. "You see, our journey has not been in vain. If we hurry—how far do you reckon he's gotten, Sheldon?"

"Uncle Chris, it is madness for you to talk of going on now," Sarah interrupted. "I won't even listen to you. Tell him—Sheldon—Will! Don't sit there and encourage such a preposterous idea!"

"I haven't encouraged him, Miss Sarah," Will objected. "Just been listening, myself."

"Of course you're right," Sheldon agreed. "Perhaps in a few days—"

"Few days be damned!" Desmond cried, and throwing back the quilt, he swung his feet to the floor.

Sheldon put a restraining hand on his shoulders. "She's right, sir. You must give yourself a little more time."

"Time!" Desmond smiled. "Do you think Tom Norris is going to pitch camp in the wilderness and wait for us to catch up with him! There's too little time as it is. That man," he went on, his glance moving slowly from one to the other, "has in his miserable hand, the power to clear my name and Sarah's—to restore Audley to me. Do you think I can lie here drinking herb brew while every day he is putting a greater distance between us?"

Will answered him in the slow, deliberate way that always marked his earnestness. "You want to get there, don't you?"

Desmond questioned him with a glance.

"Beggin' your pardon, you know nothin' of Boone's Trace. It's a long and dangerous way. You will want all your strength to see the end of it."

Desmond got to his feet, swayed weakly. When Sarah put out her hand to him, he brushed it aside, but his color had paled and in a moment he closed his eyes and sank down on the edge of the bed.

"Oh, Uncle Chris," Sarah murmured. Suddenly, she hurried across the floor and up the ladder to her room.

It was a week before Desmond spoke again of the journey to Harrod's Fort. He had been out of bed several days, making friends with the fort people, seldom returning to the Leary's cabin until nightfall.

"There's no just reason," he said to Sheldon and Will one night, when they thought him asleep in his leather-slatted bed against the wall, "why I cannot go to Kentucky alone. I would be glad if you would take Sarah back to Williamsburg—"

Will laughed softly in the darkness of the room.

"How far do you think you would get, not knowing the way?" Sheldon asked, and then he added, more softly, "If you are determined to go, Will and I will go with you. Miss Sarah can stay with the Learys."

"She would not stay without you," Desmond told Sheldon. "I believe she would follow you to doomsday."

Sheldon was silent. It was the first time he realized that Desmond, too, had seen Sarah's love for him. Will turned on the bearskin rug and pretended to sleep.

"Day after tomorrow," Sheldon said, "we will start."

Desmond's restlessness had taken hold of them all and they told the Learys that they had decided to go on immediately before the heat of midsummer made the long trek unbearable.

New Tory raids on the Holston patriot settlements had sent two families to the fort; one family—Ben and Mary Todd and their son, Bruce, a boy of eleven—was determined to press on to Kentucky. When they asked permission to join Sheldon and his party, Sheldon thought it was a great stroke of luck. It would be good for Sarah to have a woman companion on the way. No man could talk a woman's small talk with her.

In spite of repeated warnings from Leary to postpone their journey until the Indians quieted down around the forts in Kentucky, the little party started off for the ford of the Holston at dawn of the seventh day of May. The pack-horses were heavily laden with grain, powder, lead, and all the salt the fort could spare them. The Todds had their household goods piled on a horse and a mule and had one riding horse besides. Will had his two pack-horses and Sheldon had two of the three riding horses that had carried them from Augusta and were now strong again from rest and ample grazing.

The gate was swung open to let them out, the cheers and farewells of the fort people following them along the path until they were out of sight. There was a crispness in the air that made the women draw their linsey jackets tightly about them, but toward noon the sun warmed their way through the wide valley of the Holston. Will and Sheldon took turns at riding, one walking ahead, leading a pack-horse. Ben Todd and his son walked, leading their pack-horses, for Mary Todd, Sarah and Desmond used the riding horses.

They went through the Valley and crossed the Clinch Mountains at Moccasin Gap. Sugar maple, pin oak and dogwood shaded the Trace for long stretches, but the faint path was rocky. They camped on the far side of the Gap, wearied almost beyond hunger. The men soaked their feet in the mountain stream while Sarah and Mary prepared supper over a small fire Sheldon had made for them. Sarah thought her own weariness—the ache in the muscles of her back and thighs—would leave her when she lay down to sleep, but she rose from her bed of boughs the next morning still stiff and tired.

Their way grew harder now. Rougher and steeper, the Trace was only the vaguest marking of the earth. All but Desmond, who sat heavily in the saddle, had to walk to unburden the horses for the Valley crossing. The pace was slowed to Sarah's gait until she was forced to stop and rest. Sheldon waited beside her, but Will and the Todds went on, winding around ragged boulders and through thorny undergrowth, until their strength ebbed. Powell Mountain was trying to thrust them back, to make of itself an impregnable barrier against the last stretch into Kentucky.

That night they camped on the mountain. The sun had gone down behind an ominous bank of clouds that rolled leisurely toward them **as they ate their supper.** A bitter wind, howling across the ridge with **a shrill, defiant note,** stung their faces and then the rain began to fall—a **hard, lashing rain** that drove them beneath rocky ledges for protection. Sheldon sheltered Sarah as best he could, trying to soothe her weariness and soften her discouragement with reassurance that the way would be easier now.

"We go down for a long spell, and then across a valley. Don't you remember that you saw it when we were watching the clouds?"

"We should o' stayed in Black's Fort," Mary Todd cried above the noise of the rain. "There'll be no end o' climbin'. Hit's one after the other an' so hit'll be 'til we die."

"Hush," Ben said sharply. "Look where we've come from. Hit's a fairish distance, Mary. You've a right to be tired, but hit's Kentuck we set out to find an' that's where we're goin'."

They rested the next day on the mountain, deciding on the wisdom of not wearing their strength too fine. And when they took up their journey again they felt that new power had come to them, for the clearing skies and the land shining under a bright warm sun brought

the last, long descent into Kentucky somehow nearer. Bruce walked in the rear now, rifle ready at Will's direction. That night, they reached Martin's Station.

"This is our last chance for shelter," Will told them. "I reckon we'd better take it."

The Station consisted of one small cabin; the others were charred and desolate reminders of savage attacks. They lay down on their blankets to rest before bringing in water from a nearby stream, making the fire and cooking supper. Their weariness was so great that they lay staring at the ceiling, their minds reflecting only the remembered sounds of the day: the constant thud of the horses' hooves, the sliding and plodding of their own feet on stone and earth, the chirping of cardinals, and the wind in the willows beside the streams.

Desmond alone slept as he had at Black's Fort—an exhausted, motionless sleep that frightened Sarah as she lay beside him. The utter stillness of his body, the gray of fatigue in his face, had the touch of death. There was not a single reminder, in her uncle's figure, of the stout, pompous man who had been master of Audley before the siege of Norfolk.

After an hour of rest, Will and Ben rose and went out of the cabin, wandering cautiously off into the woods bordering the clearing, their rifles poised for the quick flight of game. Enough light remained to silhouette a roosting turkey or give them a shot at a rabbit, but when they came back they were empty-handed.

"Guess we scared 'em off," Will said when Sheldon returned from the stream beyond the cabin. Bruce had hopefully started a fire in the blackened fireplace and the corn pone was ready. Ben added a pocketful of berries to the evening meal and they all sat down to it in silence, until Mary sighed,

"I'd admire to see food withouten hit's made o' corn."

Sarah smiled, for the thought was in her mind, too, but she said, "I'd rather have a new pair of feet."

Desmond looked at her and she saw a smile for the first time in his bloodshot eyes.

The others nodded in agreement, for their feet were swollen and bruised and raw, constricted by their shoes. There was silence again until the meal was finished, and then they sat on the floor taking turns bathing their feet in the wooden bucket, for none dared to go to

the stream in the dark. Will had protested against the fire, saying they would draw the Indians with the smoke, but nobody wanted to eat parched corn unless there was greater cause for uneasiness.

When they lay down after supper, rest came more easily.

6

THE next day they stayed on at Martin's Station, reluctant to leave their last shelter until they had fully recovered their strength. Though the Cumberland Gap, the gateway to Kentucky, stood before their eyes, they were willing to wait. They tended their feet with cold water and herbs, renewing their strength with game and fish and the jug of cider that was the Learys' parting gift. Will and Ben agreed that the quiet grazing of the horses was a good sign. If the Indians had been stirring up trouble in Kentucky and the Holston Valley then their own little band lay untouched in the Powell Valley between two fires. Perhaps by the time they reached the Kentucky Settlements, the Indians would have moved North.

"I wonder what's goin' on in the east?" Will mused that afternoon while he and Sheldon sat on a rocky ledge, dangling their feet in the stream.

"All we know is they've driven the patriots out of New York," Sheldon replied. "It seems strange to realize that for all we can tell, Will, the British might be in the streets of Williamsburg."

Will cocked an eyebrow and poised his long, bony foot above the water. "Wish you were back there, Sheldon?"

"No, I don't think I do. The patriots are fighting against greater odds out here than they are in the east. No powder except what Virginia gives them, and what they get has to be sent from Williamsburg to Pittsburgh and down the Ohio. Think what a journey that must have been, Will, with Indians following Clark and his men all the way to Harrod's Fort. It's a wonder to me they ever got through. I reckon when we get to Harrod's Fort you and Ben and I will be as welcome as a company of militia to a Virginia battalion. I may be wrong, but it seems to me the Tories can do more damage on the frontier than they can anywhere along the coast."

Will nodded soberly. "George Shaw was tellin' me that that Tory

renegade, Simon Girty, is leadin' the Indians against the settlers in the northwest an' that he can think up more devilish tortures than even an Iroquois could."

"I guess you can thank Colonel Hamilton for any dirty work in the northwest. Do you honestly think he buys scalps from the Indians, Will?"

"Traders that've been to Detroit say he does."

The men dried their feet on the grass and, picking up their rifles, went back to the cabin. Ben was coming out of the doorway, rifle in hand, and behind him stood Bruce. His angry blue eyes bore fiercely into his father's back. "I can shoot straight as any," he cried.

"'Tain't that I doubt," Ben explained, turning around. "These woods is strange. I'd admire to keep you outen 'em."

"I ain't scared!" Bruce retorted.

"Apter than not you ain't, but Sheldon here's comin' with me, ain't you, Sheldon? An' too many—" the words trailed away as he left the cabin, Sheldon walking at his side. "Saw some turkeys roostin' in some pines yonder when I was fetchin' wood. Reckon a roasted turkey'd taste good afore we go on."

They entered the woods in silence, treading the leaves noiselessly. Sheldon thought of Clen and the way his heavy bulk could slip soundlessly over such a forest carpet. He had never learned to walk as silently as Clen or Will.

Presently Ben stopped and pointed to the horizontal branch of a pine. "They was there. Reckon I scared 'em off. There was two of 'em, one at the top an' one there."

"Shall we go on a little way? They'd most likely fly back from the clearing."

They wound on for a seemingly endless time through hickory, beech and pine. The faint flapping of wings drew them to the right. "Iffen you see 'em afore I do, jes nudge me," Ben whispered.

Sheldon nodded, searching the trees from right to left. Once they started running they'd have small chance of a shot. Suddenly Ben stopped, holding up his hand, and Sheldon followed his eyes to the roosting place of the birds. It was a long shot from where they stood, but Ben raised his rifle and Sheldon stepped aside for a clear shot of his own. That ash must be fifty yards away, he thought. Then the thought froze against another sound. With a wild flapping of

wings, the turkeys flew out of view.

"Hear that?" Ben whipped around.

"Yes, I heard it. A rifle shot. Could Bruce be shooting near the clearing?"

"It mought be that he shot at a squirrel from the cabin. An' he went into the woods, I'll give him a whippin he'll ne'er forget."

"It might be Will," Sheldon said, but his voice was tight with fear as they hastily retraced their steps toward the clearing. Neither spoke until the smell of smoke and a thick gray-blue spiral rose lazily on the still air.

"It's Indians!" Ben cried on a high note.

They broke from the woods, running across the clearing. The wind blew the heat from the flaming cabin against their faces so that they had to circle around to the door. Of Indians there was no sign, but Will's sprawling figure lay across the threshold.

The sound that came from Ben's throat when they pulled Will into the clearing was like the wail of a stricken animal. Within the cabin there was no possibility of life. One of the walls had collapsed, and the whole structure was an inferno of dancing fire. A flaming timber which had fallen across the doorway barred any sight of the interior. Once again Sheldon ran to the doorway, crying Sarah's name aloud. He felt a curious sense of detachment from his body, for while it moved back toward the place where Will lay, his horrified mind and shocked senses were within the cabin, unable to grasp from their confusion the fact that Sarah and Desmond were dead. There was nothing—nothing—unless they lived, and yet he had deliberately taken this chance with them, when he might have argued against the foolish impatience of a sick man. Behind these thoughts ran the current of a persistent, torturing question. What had they done to Sarah? A wave of fear thrust it back into a hidden channel, lest the answer come to him. Now he let the compensating numbness of shock hold thought in abeyance, and his legs carried him mechanically to Ben's side. Ben had lost both wife and son and his strong, wiry body shook with sobbing like a child's. Sheldon stood beside him scarcely knowing that he laid his hand on Ben's shoulder. He could not speak but when he had stood with Ben for a little, the older man lifted his head. "I know Mary's hair," he said. "There's none so dark an' iffen they've scalped her I'll find the Indian who done it—if hit takes me from

this-here place to the Spanish country an' to the lakes up north, I'll find the Indian."

Then he was silent, and Sheldon dropped to the ground beside him, covering his face with his hands. It seemed an eternity before his chaotic, grief-stricken brain cleared for an instant and he remembered Will, lying where they had dragged him. They had left him there without tending his wounds, as if they were crazed. He might have been dead when they pulled him away from the cabin and neither had thought of him until this moment. Sheldon ran from the stump to Will's side and knelt down, feeling beneath his jacket for the beat of his heart. His own racing pulse confused him and he pressed his ear against Will's chest. The fear of death was strong within him, until he heard a faint, irregular beat. He must work quickly, force his brain to clear thinking. His linen small clothes would make a bandage for Will's head where a gaping wound ran obliquely from the left side of his head to the right eye. Blood covered his face and hunting shirt in long, tenuous streams. Examining the rest of his body, Sheldon saw that his leggings were scorched, on one side burned through to the skin.

He yelled to Ben, and getting no response, ran back to the motionless figure on the stump. A jet of sparks shot into the air as the last upright timbers of the cabin collapsed in a cloud of red smoke. For a moment both men watched in mute agony. Sheldon thought he was going to be sick, then that he had lost his mind as he felt a crazy, desperate urge to plunge into the burning ruins. But he turned back violently and shook Ben by the shoulders. "There's Will to tend to!" he cried. "You must stay beside him while I go to the stream."

For the first time their eyes met, then Ben's moved slowly toward Will. "Ain't he dead?" he asked, lips scarcely moving.

"He's badly hurt. He'll die if we don't take care of him. Come on, Ben. Hurry!"

"I ain't agoin' to stay here. I'm agoin' to find the Indians that done this."

"I know you are," Sheldon said, trying to speak calmly, as if to a child. "But we musn't let Will die, and I need your help."

Ben nodded. "Then I'm agoin'—"

Sheldon ran down to the stream and saturated the linen with the cold clear water. While he worked over Will, washing his wound and

his face and bandaging his head, there was no sign of returning consciousness. "He must have lost a gallon of blood," he muttered, but Ben wasn't listening. His eyes were searching the edges of the clearing, peering wildly through the woods. He cocked his head as if to catch some sound.

"Reckon I'll go find the horses," he said, rising abruptly.

"Yes, Ben. Go find them. More than likely they've strayed far into the woods—frightened. But be careful. Their bells will guide you." He's gone crazy, he told himself, when Ben walked away, staggering like a drunken man. Ben mad, and he needed his solid, dependable strength to help him get Will over the mountains—to Harrod's Fort where he could be properly nursed! Maybe it was only temporary, violent shock and not real madness. If he could keep him busy, distract his mind from the glowing heap in the clearing and persuade him to rest here until Will was able to ride, there might be a chance—

He made a pillow of leaves for Will's head, and drawing up his knees sat beside him in a position to break the wind. For the first time then, he let the tears that stung his eyes come forth, and dropping his head on his knees, he cried until exhaustion extinguished the agony of feeling.

7

BEN was gone. Though Sheldon went in search of him as far as he dared, he found no sign of the way he had taken. Finally, Sheldon returned to the camp, leading one of the horses which he had found grazing at a grassy patch beside a stream. The others had disappeared.

After three days, during which he nursed Will out of delirium with a strong herb brew made in an iron kettle he had found in the cooling ashes of the cabin, Will was able to sit up, propped against a tree trunk, and eat tender pieces of boiled game. As if by tacit consent, neither spoke of the disaster, their eyes stealing to the cabin site in miserable secret glances. Will had a constant aching in his head and the sunlight burned his eyes with hot flashing stabs, but he insisted that he could travel if Sheldon could help him onto the horse.

"One more day and we will go," Sheldon promised.

The June morning they left Martin's Station was warm and, except for one short summer rain, the clear warmth continued all the two weeks of their slow journey. Sheldon remembered the ascent to Cumberland Gap and the crossing of the barrier into the Great Meadow of Kentucky as a time of almost unendurable weariness and of constant pain from swollen, scaling feet. At night the cries of owls jerked Will upright, listening for a falseness in the note, ever suspicious of Indian signals. His sleep, like Sheldon's, was scarcely more than a closing of the eyes, although fatigue pressed him to the earth with a heavy hand. They dared risk no fires until they had crossed the Cumberland River and were in the forest on Boone's faint path, only half satisfying their hunger with berries and nuts washed down with icy spring water.

And so they continued turning to the left where the path divided at Rockcastle River, straining toward Harrod's Fort, unmindful of the summer beauty: the warm, rich pattern of sumac, and the flashing plumage of birds, streaking through shafts of light, out of the undergrowth, across their path, and overhead. They went on as if their strength were apportioned for each day and they must not spend it in a turn of the head or in useless words.

According to Will's calculations and knowledge gleaned from many conversations with trappers and traders from the Ohio country, they were, by nightfall, only a day's march from Harrodsburg. Will built the fire, and Sheldon killed the game they ate, shooting as far from their camp as possible, for the discharge of a gun set up an almost unbearable aching in Will's head. After their food was cooked they put out the fire and sat talking beside the stream. Slow, leisurely talk was the luxury of their evenings and it seemed always less disturbed when the lapping of water against the bank provided a soothing undertone.

Sheldon had fought against knowing the truth about Martin's Station, yet he knew that until he had heard it, he would never be free of the nightmare which might be worse than reality. Worse—and perhaps better.

"Tell me what happened back there," he said simply. He had taken from his pocket something that he held between his fingers. After a moment's silence, he realized that Will was looking curiously at the object.

"It's Sarah's sapphire," Sheldon told him. "I found it beside the kettle."

Slowly Will drew on his pipe. Finally, he spoke in the tone of one telling another's story.

"When you and Ben went across the clearing, I hung my rifle on the peg behind the door and sat down at the table to watch Mary get the meal. She was mixing cornmeal in her wooden bowl and I recollect Sarah and Bruce were lifting the boiling pot up on the crane. Bruce was sulking, asking his mother why he wasn't allowed to shoot in the woods with his father. Mary told him to hush and then there was quiet. That is, 'twas quiet inside the cabin, but outside the horses were restless. One whinnied and then they all started running. I'd a mind to see what frightened 'em without scarin' the others. Quiet as I could I took down my rifle. Then I stood for a moment looking at it, like I'd a mind to clean it. There was a shot then 'an I saw Sarah fall onto the hearth. I saw it out o' the corner o' my eye before I turned round an' then I can't remember nothin' except an Indian's face an' scalp lock." He finished speaking and his eyes were still on the stream. He heard Sheldon draw a sharp breath; then he turned his head and their eyes met.

"You think the shot killed her, Will?"

"I think so."

"I wish I were certain of it."

"From the way she fell, I'm sure it did."

Sheldon's voice rose, suddenly metallic. "You aren't telling me this to comfort me, Will? They didn't scalp her?"

Will took his pipe from his mouth and leaned forward, measuring his words slowly. "What I say is the truth. I can recollect that much."

A silence fell between them giving way to the small sounds of the woods and the distant howling of a wolf. When Sheldon spoke Will could scarcely hear his words. "I want more than ever to find Tom Norris."

WHEN they approached Harrod's Fort late the next afternoon, Sheldon fired his rifle to warn of their arrival. A gate swung open, and they

were urged on by the welcoming cries of the people who ran out to meet them.

The settlers took them to one of the cabins within the stockade wall and heard their story with faces that grew darker as the tragedy unfolded. They had little comment to make then, for all knew that the new arrivals needed warm food and rest and that the less said of the journey the better.

Eli James and his wife, Deborah, kept them in their cabin for four days, Deborah nursing Will in spite of his protests, washing his wound of the dirt that was embedded in it with a liquid made of herbs and boiling water. It occurred to Will, after a bit, that they wanted no weak men in the fort and he resigned himself patiently to her ministrations.

Sheldon slept most of the first two days, rising only to eat and to bathe his feet when their aching became intolerable; but on the third day he walked about in the square of the fort, watching the people at work, taking in every detail of this walled town in the wilderness. Men passed through the gateways carrying rifles and axes, going to and from their garden patches outside the stockade; others brought their rifles and implements to the smith's shop in the square. The women with their piggins at the spring would break their small talk to recount new tales of the Indian raids that had commenced in earnest with the furious onslaught against the forts in April. Harrod's Fort had lost some of its best men, men they could ill-afford to spare and had little hope of replacing. The loss bred a greater wariness among those of the two hundred inhabitants who refused to believe that the worst was over.

Sheldon was walking back across the square toward the James's cabin when he heard someone call his name. He turned, surprised to be known to a young man whom he had never seen before. The man was scarcely more than twenty-five, he judged, but the shrewdness in his keen blue eyes and slightly bulging brow gave to his expression the gravity of a man twice his years. He came toward Sheldon with long strides.

"You are Hilliard—Sheldon Hilliard?"

Sheldon bowed to the tall, robust figure. "And you, sir?"

"Clark's my name, George Rogers Clark." The smile that lit his face twisted boyishly. I'd like to talk with you."

"Pleasure, sir. Your name is honored by everyone who speaks of the frontier. At Black's Fort, only a month ago, we heard of your successful mission in Williamsburg." Sheldon's level gaze was frankly admiring. "Would you care to talk in the James's cabin, sir? I have a sick companion there who admires you as greatly as I do. It would do him good to meet you."

"As you wish," Clark replied. "I'm anxious to hear of the country you have just passed through. You bring the latest news of Powell Valley and the east."

"I will be glad to tell you what I can, though I fear it won't add much to what you already know." Sheldon led the way into the cabin where Will was dozing in a chair before the hearth. Shaking him gently to waken him, he introduced Clark. Into Will's eyes that had been dull and disinterested for so long there sprang a sudden light. There was a fleeting silence before Clark extended his hand. "I fancy that I have seen you before, Mr. McKee. You are a Valley man?"

"Augusta, Major Clark. But if we met, I'd not be the one to forget it."

Clark's eyebrows came together in puzzled thought, his eyes remaining on Will's face, moving from feature to feature. "It was in Staunton. I recall it now. You brought in some pelts. You were pointed out to me as a man who knew the Valley like you knew skins."

Pleasure colored Will's face. "Wish I knew this country as well," he said. "It would have saved much trouble. It might've saved me this." He touched the scar on his brow. "They told me at Black's Fort it was the Tories causin' the trouble down here. They weren't Indians I was lookin' for."

Clark took a seat opposite Will, and Sheldon dropped down on the bearskin. "There you have the source of much of our trouble—the Tories. Since the outbreak of the war they have filtered west in great numbers, and Colonel Hamilton's proclamation has made Loyalists of the waverers all along the frontier." He leaned forward to give emphasis to his words. "British agents have been carrying the royal oath of allegiance through the back settlements of Virginia and Pennsylvania with such effect that county drafts in Augusta were openly resisted. Some say they've been going among the Indians, telling them that only the British King can protect them from our

designs upon their lands. If we could crush the Tory influence—" His voice trailed off, then he asked Will, "Have you heard of William Hinton, in Augusta?"

"Never have," Will said.

"He's raised seventy-five men and administered the British oath to them. They're a plague to the Valley."

"Is there a man here in the fort named Tom Norris?" Sheldon put the question more abruptly than he had intended.

Clark regarded him with curiosity, sensing a certain tenseness in the question. "He came in the spring of '76. Lives in the cabin next to the blockhouse by the north gate."

Sheldon's relief was so obvious that Clark inquired, "He is a friend of yours?"

"Hardly that. I don't even know him by sight. But I think it will interest you to know who he is." Sheldon got to his feet and stood with his back to the broad fireplace. The late morning had lengthened into afternoon when he had concluded his story of the Desmonds.

"And you came here seeking this man?" Clark asked.

"He is the only person who can exonerate Desmond," Sheldon said.

"Do you imagine that he will do it?"

"I had hoped, sir, that with your help he might be persuaded to do it. But if he can't be persuaded, there are other means."

Clark eyed him with a narrowing glance. There was a strange hardness in the set of his face. "You haven't forgotten, have you, that I am in command here or that your own position is none too secure?"

"I have resigned my commission," Sheldon replied shortly. "But what happens to me doesn't particularly concern me. McKee and I have endured much to reach this end. Two people have already sacrificed their lives to it. That, you must admit, sir, is reason enough for any man to be determined not to fail at this point."

Clark seemed to study his hands for several minutes. There was no indication in his expression of what effect, if any, Sheldon's words had had on him. Finally he said, "You told me that you hoped for my help. May I ask you a question that may seem irrelevant?"

"Certainly, sir."

"What had you intended to do after accomplishing your purpose here?"

"I intended to return to Williamsburg with the evidence of Mr.

Desmond's innocence." He paused and his eyes turned to Will. "After that, I had hoped to start a new life in Kentucky."

This remark seemed particularly to interest Clark but he made no comment. He looked as though he were waiting for Sheldon to go on.

"I will never feel that I have accomplished my purpose nor that Desmond's name has been cleared until his conviction is stricken from the records," Sheldon continued. "That will really be a matter for the Governor to settle. As far as ever undoing the injustice of the punishment or confiscation of his plantation is concerned—of course, that is hopeless. You can't recall the dead."

Clark frowned. "Have you never realized that you will have to clear yourself in Williamsburg?"

"Yes. But surely that will logically follow Desmond's exoneration."

"Not necessarily," Clark said. "How do you know your resignation was accepted?"

"I don't."

"There is your answer. But I think that is something to worry about after you pass the first obstacle."

Will had been following this conversation closely. Suddenly he said, "What they think o' Sheldon, they've got to think of me, Major Clark. If it hadn't been for me, I reckon Desmond wouldn't have gotten farther than Francis Street. After all, I'm the fellow that got him out o' that jail and it was a pretty piece of work, if I say so myself."

For the first time Clark smiled. "I'll admit I'd like to have seen that, McKee."

"Are you going to help us?" Will asked.

Clark nodded. "I thought I could spot a Tory anywhere. Norris passed himself off as a patriot and spun a tale I confess I believed. We'll see what kind of a tale he spins now." He got up from his chair. "I think the sooner we settle this matter the better, Hilliard."

Sheldon and Will followed him across the warm and sunny square to Norris's cabin. It was funny, Will thought, how an afternoon like this could determine the whole future of a man. If Clark was convinced they had right on their side, he had no doubt that Governor Henry would think so, too. Then, most likely, they would be free to go where they chose. He supposed he'd go on living the rest of his life the way he had lived it thus far. He didn't care very much for

himself whether Governor Henry thought he was innocent or guilty. If they put him in jail, he'd get out. He hadn't sweated and bled and beaten his body down to skin and bones for nothing. He knew he was right and it mattered more to him what he thought of himself than it did what the noble Virginians thought.

With Sheldon it was different. Whether he lived in the Tidewater or not, he had a name that was worth protecting.

Clark stopped in front of the cabin and called to Norris through the open doorway. A mild voice invited them to enter.

Clark led the way.

"Good afternoon, Major," Norris said cordially, then his glance fell on the two strangers and an uneasiness came into his manner as Clark introduced Will and Sheldon.

"Be seated, gentlemen," Norris invited, but he himself remained standing, shifting his eyes constantly from one to another of his visitors.

Sheldon was surprised to find him apparently as mild as his voice—a squat and rather drab little man who looked incongruously soft for one who had made the long trek from Norfolk to Kentucky.

Clark went quickly to the point. "Norris, I understand that you were in Norfolk during the siege. Is that correct?"

For just an instant the Tory's eyes narrowed furtively. Will smiled to himself. He knew a better way to settle this matter.

"Yes. I was there," Norris replied.

Clark turned to Sheldon. "I suggest that you explain your visit here. The details are clearer in your mind than in mine."

Sheldon, whose eyes had followed every expression in Norris's face, took up the questioning cautiously. Here was a man who would be easily frightened into silence.

"Did you by chance know Mr. Christopher Desmond?" he asked.

Norris looked at Clark when he replied. "Yes. We were neighbors."

"Were you aware that he was tried in Williamsburg for alleged aid to the Tories on Lord Dunmore's ships?"

Norris was genuinely alarmed. He strode nervously across the floor and stood before Sheldon. "They tried *him*!"

Sheldon nodded. "And convicted him. Would you call that an injustice, Norris?"

Norris's pale eyes blinked owlishly. "Yes."

"Why?"

"He refused to help them."

Sheldon asked slowly, with open emphasis, "And it was you who solicited that support?"

Norris clamped his lips together. Suddenly his glance shifted to Will's wiry figure, then moved upward to the hunter's eyes. He had seen that look before in men's eyes. It boded no good.

"Come, Norris," Clark said impatiently, "we are quite aware of your Tory sympathies."

"What trouble have I ever given you here, sir?" he cried in a rising voice. "I have had my share of the fighting and I've done my share of the work. Only last summer—"

"I know. I know," Clark acknowledged. "I have no complaint of your behavior here. You have fought as bravely as any man in the defense of the fort. But you came here posing as a patriot." He let the reminder take effect, then he added quietly, "I would advise you to answer Hilliard's question."

There was heavy silence in the room before Norris replied. Suddenly the water in an iron kettle suspended over the fire began to boil. Norris watched the steam rise in a thin cloud. "There was another and I who asked his help. He refused it. Thinking of his niece's safety, he claimed, but it's my opinion he had no guts."

Sheldon lowered his face into the palms of his hands. Will rose to his feet and stretched his back. Only Clark, looking slightly puzzled, spoke.

"There is your answer, and the accomplishment of your mission."

Sheldon raised his head and nodded. He felt none of the elation he had expected to feel. Instead, he felt mentally weary, as if he were just beginning another and more arduous journey of which the purpose was only vaguely defined.

"What are you going to do with me?" Norris demanded.

"There is only one thing to do," Clark told him. "You will have to be sent back to Virginia. But I can assure you that I will not make light of the part you have taken in the defense of the fort." He motioned Sheldon and Will from the cabin. On the threshold he paused, and turning to Norris added, "You are to remain in the fort until I send for you."

The three men walked slowly back across the square. "I believe,"

Clark told Sheldon, "that a signed statement from Norris, witnessed by myself, will be sufficient to clear Desmond's name with the Committee of Safety. Is that what you wanted?"

"I want his conviction stricken from the record."

"I suppose that will follow," Clark said. "I think if we draw up a statement that leaves no doubt of Desmond's position—mind you, it will have to be worded carefully. In the hands of the Committee one loop-hole will suffice—"

"I know, sir," Sheldon exploded. "They'd sooner hang a man than not."

Clark stopped and faced Sheldon with a look of displeasure. "Those are not the words of a patriot."

Sheldon colored. "I think I am more of a patriot than any of them. They cry for justice but do not practice it."

Clark shrugged his shoulders. "That is a matter of opinion. If you present your case with that attitude, I fear you are lost. And you have yourself to consider. You and McKee are deserters—"

"I'm not," Will retorted. "I was granted leave. And Sheldon resigned his commission."

"He will be lucky if it was accepted." Clark walked on and Sheldon and Will fell in step at his side. "Even as civilians you would stand the charge of assisting the escape of a Tory."

"But a Tory not inimical to the Colony—" Sheldon began.

"A prisoner of the Colony," Clark reminded him.

For the first time Sheldon felt the futility of the whole affair. Every way he turned he put his foot in a trap. It didn't seem that he would ever win out in any cause he fought for. A man might as well forget his sense of justice and decency these days; watch with utter complacency while the Sons of Liberty and their kind hounded honorable people and made a laughing-stock of men's rights.

Suddenly he thought of Sarah and the remembrance of her courage shamed him. She had never once questioned a journey that she, too, with more right than he, might have thought futile.

"What do you think I should do?" he asked Clark abruptly as they went back to the James's cabin.

Clark ran his fingers through his hair and scratched the back of his neck. "I'd like to give this some thought. You see, it is my duty to inform the Governor that you are here. In the autumn I am going

to Williamsburg," he told them and then added, musingly, "to present a scheme of my own. But that is many weeks hence."

The noise of great commotion in the fort enclosure sent Clark from the cabin, with Will and Sheldon following him like hounds on a scent. From every direction people were hurrying toward the open south gate. Clark edged his way through the crowd, reaching the gate as a hunting party returned, bearing one of their companions.

Fresh men relieved the hunters of their burden, their path to his cabin marked by drops of blood.

Faces, hardened with apprehension, crowded around the door. There was no talking now. All eyes were on Clark as he questioned the hunters.

"Must be Shawnees again," one told him. "The arrow came from nowhere. It struck McFarland in the back."

"You saw no Indians—heard nothing?"

The hunter shook his head.

Clark turned to the crowd in the doorway. "Double the sentries in the blockhouses, and go back to your work. There is nothing you can do here."

They dispersed reluctantly.

One of the men had turned McFarland on his stomach and had torn his shirt free from the ragged hole between his shoulder blades. Another was brewing herbs in water to wash the wound. McFarland still breathed, but the deathly pallor of his skin told Will their labors would do no good.

Toward nightfall, Will heard the long hoot of an owl. His ear, attuned to every forest sound, detected a falseness in the note. He said nothing but stood at the stockade wall listening. Only his eyes moved, following the wary men of the fort guarding gates and stockades, scanning the woods beyond the fort. There was something eerie about their figures in the deepening light. He saw Clark moving among his men and went toward him. He could see that the Major had been like a cat on hot coals all afternoon, checking every firearm himself, ordering the big iron kettles filled with boiling water. A dozen times he had climbed the ladders to the tops of the blockhouses, had gone into each cabin to speak words of confidence to the women. It was not an easy thing for them to face the threat of an unseen attack.

Will touched his arm and Clark turned swiftly.

"I'd like a word with you, Major," he said.

They drew away from the men.

"There are Indians in the woods," Will told him.

Clark stiffened almost imperceptibly. "You are sure?"

"Aye. I know the signals."

"Well, we are ready." Clark's eyes moved quickly around the fort. They were clearly appraising, without fear. But Will saw in his tense jaw muscles sign of the accumulated strain of many attacks and of the knowledge that every one they withstood, though it hardened the survivors, weakened their defense.

All through the long twilight the fort waited under tension. Sheldon and Will, who stood watch in the blockhouses, sensed in the restrained talk of the other men the same underlying current of watchfulness that had pervaded the talk around the campfires on the Kanawha expedition.

When night fell, the first attack came. From where he watched in the thin light of the moon, Sheldon saw that the Indians were coming from the woods in seemingly endless waves, wheeling their horses to encircle the fort. He picked his target and fired. A long-legged Shawnee bent over the saddle, half-turned and slid to the ground. For a moment, his frightened horse pawed the air, then galloped off wildly.

Close below Sheldon a savage screamed, and stumbled toward the woods, holding his face. Water ran off his back and dripped from his breech clout. Boiling water had made short work of his efforts to scale the stockade. It was difficult to see how many had been turned from the fort by the rapid, continuous gun-fire, but he guessed, from the noise within the fort enclosure, that the attackers had done their share of damage. Sheldon's shoulder ached from the kick of his gun, but he was sure he had accounted for five of the grotesquely sprawling figures beyond the stockade wall.

He left his place to peer down into the fort. A handful of Indians had succeeded in scaling the south gate and had flung it open. Intermittent flashes and puffs of smoke came from the cabin doorways. Some of the women were as good shots as the men. Sheldon saw a full-skirted figure step from her cabin and pick off the leader of the Indians riding through the gateway. She got him as squarely between

the eyes as Will might have done.

Sheldon raised his rifle and shot into the midst of the raiders. There was the agonized screech of a horse and then suddenly, the fort men seemed to concentrate their fire from every side on the south gate. A stocky Shawnee, hideous in war paint, leaped from his horse and ran into a cabin, coming out after a few minutes with a scalp dangling from a long strand of blond hair. Sheldon gave a single, sickened cry and bolted down the ladder. A baby wailed in its wooden cradle pushed into a dark corner of the blockhouse. He ran on into the open and crouching beside the cabin wall, laid the last of his ammunition on the ground. When this was gone, he would have to use his hunting knife. He looked for the Indian with the scalp lock and then for the first time saw Will. The hunter's arm was raised and in his hand steel flashed. In a moment it was circling swiftly through the air. A broad, dark back twisted, described a half-arc and pitched forward.

The Indian with the scalp lock came out of the shadows of the stockade, leaped over the figure and ran for the gate. Sheldon aimed at his stomach. He wasn't taking any chances in the dim light. Half-way across the fort, the Indian sprang into the air and flopped on his face. Sheldon realized then that one of the settlers had been pursuing him, for the man jerked to a halt, stared down at his enemy for just a moment and fell to his knees beside him, stabbing wildly at the lifeless form. Suddenly he reared back, lifted his head and then rolled slowly over on his side.

It was several minutes before Sheldon realized that the Indians were retreating. Clark, at the head of a dozen men, was moving from cabin to cabin toward the gate, exchanging shots with the last of the raiders who were backing off, firing wildly now only to cover their escape. Sheldon on his side of the fort moved forward with the others. But when the Indians turned to flee, bending and weaving to make of themselves less easy targets, not a single shot stopped them.

The heavy gate was closed and barred. Clark ordered all but four of his men back to the blockhouses and the stockade. "They may attack again when they have recovered their forces," he warned.

He took charge of the wounded. The men carried them back to the cabins where the women had already prepared the hard, leather-slatted beds for the fallen.

Women and men alike rolled up their sleeves, cleaned and sharpened knives and nodded to the strongest of the men standing by to pinion the limbs of the victims. Only the unconscious were spared the agony of the deftly handled blades, incising, probing, laying bare the tortured flesh.

It was morning before all the wounded were dressed and the dead laid out for burial. Clark summoned the people into the square to commend them for their courage. In a voice taut as a bowstring, he told them that he himself was going to Williamsburg to plead for ammunition and reinforcements. "A fort that can stand against repeated attacks deserves recognition. The Governor in Virginia shall hear this from one who has seen all your bravery." His voice broke a little. "You will have to endure other attacks, I have no doubt, before help comes, but they will grow fewer and fewer as we prove our determination not to fall."

The people returned slowly to their cabins. They trusted Clark, but it was asking much to go on living against such odds.

It was Will who first discovered that Norris was missing. He went in search of Clark and asked him if the Tory was among the dead.

"No. Nor the wounded," Clark said and together they made the rounds of the cabins and blockhouses.

"That son of a bitch has got away!" Will cried when they stood again in Norris's empty cabin.

Clark pressed the palms of his hands against his eyes. Presently he said, "He must have escaped during the raid."

"I'd like your permission to go after him." Will said.

"You have my permission," Clark told him, "but it will be a futile pursuit. There's no way of telling which way he's gone, though it's most likely he'll try for the Tory settlements north." He let his large frame down onto a cane-bottomed chair. "Looks like I'm your witness, McKee, and you and Hilliard will have to go to Williamsburg with me." He paused, his glance settling on Will's angry features. "You've both earned your salt here. I reckon it won't be hard to defend you. There's an expedition I have in mind might interest you when we have made your peace with the Committee of Safety."

Will's anger gave way slowly to curiosity. "What's that, sir?"

Clark laughed. "You're a born fighter, McKee. It's an expedition

to the Illinois to try to settle the Indian menace, but there'll be plenty of time to talk of it on the journey east."

Will thrust his thumbs in the top of his breeches.

"Sheldon's going to be mighty sick when he hears about Norris."

"It won't do him much good," Clark said wearily. He stifled a yawn. "Now I'm going to get some sleep."

PART VIII
“— AND LIFE”

A gusty November wind blew the leaves in eddies and swung the shop and tavern signs above Duke of Gloucester Street. It seemed to the three weary, dust-coated travelers who had left Harrod's Fort thirty days before that the signs were like a myriad welcoming hands. The excitement occasioned by the news of Burgoyne's surrender to Gates at Saratoga a month before apparently was still abroad in the jaunty, confident stride of the militiamen and the cheerful banter of the Williamsburgers gathered in groups on the street.

"Well, I reckon I'll end my days in the jail, but I sure am glad to see this place," Will said heartily and without the slightest evidence of real concern.

George Rogers Clark added solemnly, "I agree, Will. There's only one thing that troubles me."

"What's that?" Sheldon asked. He was as much in doubt of his future as he had ever been in his life, but the air of Williamsburg was beginning to cheer him up.

Clark glanced from one to the other lugubriously. Then abruptly he smiled, and the smile added something to the confidence of his companions. "I don't think that expedition to the Illinois is going to evoke the proper enthusiasm unless I can count on you two as the nucleus of the party."

Will snorted. "A lot o' good we'll be to you by the time the Governor gets through with us."

"I don't know, Will," Sheldon said, with a half-hearted effort to appear casual. "Mr. Henry treated us very considerately once."

"Yeh!" Will drawled, glancing at his friend. "We were proposing to join the Hanover Volunteers then. We've learned a lot since."

"But you forget," Clark said, "that I agreed to use my influence in your behalf. Not that I can promise anything—"

"If that doesn't get us off, I'll give myself up willingly," Will professed, in a voice so loud that several passers-by stopped to stare at him. Then more quietly, he added, "I can't complain, whichever way

it happens. Whenever I think of Williamsburg, I think of my last visit to the jail—and Pelham, who never knew what happened to him.” He chuckled to himself and cast a sheepish eye at Clark.

Before the Raleigh Tavern the three men drew rein. Clark turned to Sheldon. “Will you be good enough to ask Southall to reserve me a room? I have some business to attend to before I join you again. Then I hope we may have a large dinner and plenty of wine.”

He rode away from them before Sheldon could reply. Will shook his head. “I’ve got kind of used to depending on him,” he said, and gave a thin, nervous laugh.

Sheldon’s voice, as he spoke, made Will grunt. “With Major Clark recommending leniency in our cases, I guess we’re almost sure to get it.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure. In the eyes of the law in Virginia, how they must hate us now. After all, Sheldon, we did aid and abet—is that the word—a Tory to escape them.”

“I know. But with Major Clark to bear witness that the Tory they convicted was innocent—” Then he shook his head at his own remark. “Thank God, I had the foresight to resign my commission. Whatever I did after that, I don’t see how they can court-martial me. Of course, I don’t mean that filthy, pest-ridden jail will be any more pleasant.”

Southall greeted Sheldon like a long-lost brother. For an uncomfortable moment, he thought the little man was going to embrace him. “’Tis Lieutenant Hilliard and my eyes do not deceive me!” he cried. “Only the other day, sir, Mr. Burwell was asking me if I had seen you.”

“I’ve been on the frontier. In Kentucky, Southall.”

“My word, sir!” Southall gasped.

“Needless to tell you, we’re vastly tired. We want quiet rooms, the barber, and baths—in the order named.”

“We are rather full, but I think I can give you something to your satisfaction,” Southall said, leading the way up the stairs.

“Major George Rogers Clark will want a room tonight—a quiet room, also,” Sheldon announced, smiling at the sudden interest in Southall’s sharp features. “Does that name suggest the frontier to you?”

“Oh, yes—” Southall breathed.

"He is worthy of the best that you have, Southall." Sheldon spoke seriously as if to a confidant.

"He shall have the best in the house," Southall murmured.

2

Just after four o'clock Sheldon and Will were strolling down the Palace Green. Their soiled buckskins had improved a little in appearance under the able hands of the Raleigh valet, but they still did not make a very prepossessing pair. And hot baths and the barber had done little to remove from their faces the evidence of fatigue etched there by the arduous journey. Will had been all for giving themselves a day to rest and find new clothes, but Sheldon was too impatient for the interview with Governor Henry. Whatever was going to happen to them now, he wanted to know without delay. "I can't rest, anyhow, with this hanging over my head," he protested, and so they had gone forth, Will disgruntledly, Sheldon whistling nervously to himself.

What he wanted to do now was to go with Major Clark on his expedition to the Illinois country, if Clark got permission from the Governor. But permission was almost certain. Patrick Henry would be the last man on earth to turn an unsympathetic ear to such a proposition.

Will interrupted his reflections. "Do you reckon the Governor will see us? I can't stand this suspense much longer, myself."

"Remember the last time we went to see him," Sheldon reminded him. "It brought us luck just to turn up without asking for an interview. Perhaps it will bring us luck again."

Will grunted. "I don't know but what we were fools not to stay in Kentucky. They'd be glad enough to have us fightin' out there without askin' a lot o' questions."

"That isn't the point," Sheldon answered absently. "We've almost won our private battle, Will. We can't stop before we're through."

They went the rest of the way in silence, down the green and through the Palace gate. The courtyard was empty of carriage or chaise, much to Sheldon's relief, for he wanted to see Henry alone. Any more time in waiting, he knew, would make them inarticulate

with nerves. Will had been on hot coals ever since they had turned up in the Valley, fearing that they would meet Foutré and end up in the Staunton jail.

As they started up the Palace steps, the door of the office at their right opened. "Sheldon Hilliard!" The full tone of the well remembered voice rang through the enclosure as they turned to face Governor Henry standing on the threshold.

Sheldon ran back down the steps, hoping that his concern over the reception in store for him was not too obvious in the quick coloring of his face. "I had hoped for the good fortune to find you here, sir," he cried. "Can you spare us a few moments of your time? We have just arrived from Kentucky and are here on an urgent matter."

Henry extended his hand without answering Sheldon's question. "I am glad to see you again. I thought possibly you had deserted us." He smiled warmly, with a reproachful lift of his eyebrows, then taking Sheldon's arm, he walked with him across the enclosure to Will.

"You remember Will McKee, sir?"

"Indeed, very well." It seemed to Sheldon that there was something vaguely disquieting in Henry's manner, as if he had an unpleasant duty to perform and was putting it off as long as possible. Will, clearly discomfited, bowed low, but his eyes did not evade Henry's. Perhaps, he thought, it was Mr. Henry's peach-colored velvet coat that made him seem a little stiffer than the man in homespun he had met at Scotchtown. And after all, he had been only a Burgess then. Now he was the Governor—the first Governor of Virginia, and maybe he was fitting his manner to his high office. A hasty side glance at Sheldon told Will that his friend's confidence had not been restored by the meeting.

"Come into the Palace," Henry said. "I grow monstrosly tired of that office." He started up the steps. His slight stoop had become more pronounced, his gait slower and less elastic.

Sheldon, walking at his side, could scarcely trust himself to speak. He wanted to blurt out his news, but he said, instead, "You must long for Scotchtown, but Virginia is fortunate to have you here, sir."

Inside the Palace hall, Henry turned to face him, his eyes as keen and speculative as Sheldon last remembered them. "You are ever a loyal friend. And I dare say your loyalties have been strained even

since we served Virginia at Doncastle's."

Sheldon tried to suppress a rush of embarrassment. Mr. Henry hadn't meant that unkindly. Perhaps he did not refer so much to further trouble with Braxton as to his support of Desmond. After all, Mr. Henry and Desmond had been neighbors. His eyes met the Governor's uncertainly. "You know why I have come here, sir?"

"I know all about it," Henry replied. "But come upstairs. We will discuss it there."

They were led to the wide, square hall that overlooked the Palace green. Before the windows stood the massive mahogany desk at which, Sheldon imagined, Lord Dunmore had written his iniquitous proclamations. Henry motioned them to chairs in front of it, then summoned a servant and ordered rum toddies. As if marshaling his thoughts, he picked up a silver paper cutter and tapped the end on a black leather portfolio. Suddenly he sighed and began to direct innumerable questions at Will about the frontier, principally regarding the state of defenses.

More at ease on familiar ground, Will replied to one, "I reckon they'll hold out if they don't starve to death."

Henry's eyes widened in shocked surprise. "It is as bad as that!"

Will nodded vigorously. "Indians ruined their crops, and made it so hot for 'em only a few dared go out to hunt. But they're hard folk and they're used to trouble. I reckon they'll make out somehow."

"You saw considerable fighting while you were there?"

"Time we arrived, the worst attacks were over. In April, they were. But we had a good taste of it."

"Twice Will came close to losing his scalp," Sheldon interposed wryly. "But Major Clark—he's a great leader, sir. He gives you confidence, and he knows the frontier and the Indians like the palm of his hand. We would have been ambushed more than once if he hadn't an uncanny instinct for signs. He seems to know by the flick of a horse's tail when there are Indians about."

The servant returned with the drinks and handed them around. Sheldon took courage from the fiery liquor. He leaned forward in his chair, and with one hand gripping his knee, addressed Henry with as much outward calm as if he were discussing the possibility of rain.

"Do you recall the Desmond trial, sir?" he asked.

"I recall it well—and his escape from the jail," Henry replied in

a tone as casual as Sheldon's, but with considerably more emphasis.

"Do you also remember, sir, the charges on which he was convicted?"

"Assisting the enemy, I believe."

"Yes. Joining with Robert Speddin and Tom Norris in sending provisions to Dunmore's ships lying off Norfolk."

Henry's whole attitude implied that he was willing to listen.

"I found Norris at Harrod's Fort," Sheldon went on. "In the presence of Major Clark he admitted that Desmond refused to send aid to the Tories at Norfolk—Major Clark is here to bear witness to that fact."

"I know. I know. I have already heard of it," Henry told him.

"Major Clark has been here?"

"Yes, and he defended both of you more eloquently than you could possibly defend yourselves."

"Is his word not sufficient, sir?" Sheldon asked, wishing that Will wouldn't keep crossing and recrossing his legs. It was making him nervous. Henry ignored the question, and put one himself.

"You were both at Harrod's Fort?"

Sheldon nodded.

"You acknowledged Major Clark as your military superior. Let us assume that Major Clark did not handle matters quite to your satisfaction. Would you have taken the law into your own hands and dealt with those matters accordingly?"

"Of course not, sir!" Sheldon replied, with more rancor in his tone than he had intended.

"But you will take Virginia law into your own hands!" Henry cried, and rising from the desk, turned his back on the two men, ignoring their protestations while he stared down at the Palace green.

When he turned again to face them, Sheldon was on his feet, the palms of his hands flattened on the desk and his eyes blazing. "You know me better than that, sir! I took no steps in Mr. Desmond's behalf until he was already imprisoned in the jail. He was sick, as Pelham himself admitted. He would not have lasted a week in that pest-ridden hole. I—"

Will rose and laid a restraining hand on Sheldon's arm. He was smiling, but it was a smile something like the one that always crossed his lips when he raised his rifle to his shoulders. "Don't take

all the credit, Sheldon," he drawled. "After all, it was me who disposed of Pelham."

"You did it because you knew how I felt!" Sheldon reminded him, shaking off his hand.

Will shook his head, and the smile was gone. Pushing aside a chair, he walked to the window and stood at Henry's side. "Mr. Governor," he said, "men like me never expect to be as important as the Governor of Virginia, but do you know what I'd do if I was?"

Henry shook his head, and his frankly curious gaze met Will's. "What?"

"I'd string fellows like Foutré higher than Haman, and let fellows like Sheldon and me, who love Virginia as much as you do, sir, fight for her wherever we pleased."

Slowly Henry raised his hand and put it on Will's thin shoulder. "It's a funny thing," he said, "but that's just what I had in mind. However, for matters of state, we'll have to dispense with Foutré's hanging."

Will laughed, and suddenly his eyes were moist. He dropped into Henry's chair behind the mahogany desk. "Then the Committee isn't going to try us? You'll be able to pardon us now—today?"

Henry shook his head and his face grew more solemn. "Even the Governor of Virginia has to account to the Committee of Safety for his decisions. I think Norris's statement will enable me to stick by my guns."

"That means—" Sheldon began. Lamely, he finished, "I resigned my commission, sir."

"But your resignation was not accepted," Henry told him. "And I should like to tell you that you are a hare-brained young fool for having handed it in. I fear you have not yet learned that when you are right, you must act accordingly."

"I thought I did," Sheldon answered, reddening.

"Your resignation was a confession of weakness," Henry rebuked him. "Colonel Woodford recognized it as such. He granted you long leave for your service at Norfolk. Bill Christian told me about it, knowing you served under me in Hanover."

Sheldon sank back into his chair. Would he never learn how to behave in a crisis? Governor Henry might have been Aunt Florrie reminding him that he was a man, expected to act as one, and he

felt as much sadness and humiliation as he did the day she sailed away to England. It was queer how the harder he tried to do the right thing the surer he was to be wrong.

Henry's voice broke into his thoughts. "There is one point that must be settled. Pelham accuses Mr. McKee of having struck him with a club, rendering him incapable of preventing Desmond's escape."

The lightning change in Will's expression galvanized Henry's attention. Will threw his head back and roared. Tears rolled down his cheeks until Henry cried irritably, "Mr. McKee, I will thank you to remember that this is the Governor's Palace, not a playhouse."

"I'm sorry, sir," Will choked. "The club was a bottle of the Bull's Head's best Jamaica rum. An empty bottle, sir, for every drop of the rum went down Pelham's lying throat. I left him like a dead mackerel."

Henry couldn't resist smiling. "That is not difficult for me to understand. Pelham's weakness for rum, good or bad, bears investigation." He coughed into a handkerchief. "Well, er—*Captain* Hilliard, a good record is difficult to forget. I understand you and Mr. McKee are of a mind to join Major Clark in his expedition to the Illinois."

"We had hoped to, sir."

Henry nodded. "I feel quite sure the expedition will have the approval of the Assembly. For myself, I shall certainly endorse it. And now, Mr. McKee, if you will pardon us, I have something to say to Hilliard which I would rather say in private." Henry coughed again behind his hand, then added, soberly, "I must ask you not to leave Williamsburg until this matter is acted upon by the Committee of Safety."

Will nodded and shifted his feet uneasily. "How long do you reckon that will be, sir?"

"Within the week."

Will started to speak, then catching Sheldon's eye, bowed and took his leave.

HENRY folded his hands before him on the desk, reminding Sheldon of a schoolmaster about to chastise a small boy. "You realize," he

said, "that no power of mine could pardon you and Mr. McKee, were this a case of aiding an enemy of the Colonies. But I feel certain that your exoneration will automatically follow upon establishment of Desmond's innocence." He seemed to study his long, interlaced fingers before he went on. "I have unpleasant news of a different nature for you. Chericoke burned in December last year—on the eve of Colonel Braxton's departure for the Congress."

Sheldon sat bolt upright in his chair. "Chericoke burned! Colonel Braxton and Mrs. Braxton—the children—"

"They are all right, but the burning of Chericoke is not the most serious loss to Colonel Braxton."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"He is rapidly losing whatever prestige he enjoyed in the Tidewater. He is trading indiscriminately, to make money at the expense of the Colony. Unless he comes to his senses, nothing can prevent his ruin. He was omitted in the Delegation to Congress for this year."

"But why?"

"A number of reasons. Economy was the principle one."

"Well, at least there is no disgrace in that!"

"You have not seen the pamphlet he issued? A reactionary plan for the new state government."

"One sees little of those things in Kentucky, sir."

"It was disgraceful!" Henry cried. "Nothing but a monarchical scheme. He cannot stomach the thought that all men are born equal, free and independent. He insulted the intelligence of patriotic thinkers by throwing in a sop to any who might accuse him of Toryism—babbling that the new proofs of British tyranny had removed all chance of reconciliation with England, as if there were a man who did not know that!"

Sheldon bridled and felt his blood kindling. "Is it fair to infer that he is falling back upon deception? He has always been outspoken. Everyone knows him for a conservative."

"You do not see the point," Henry replied, more calmly. "What did Braxton envisage as he wrote that pamphlet? Undoubtedly the disappearance, under democracy, of his wines, his plate and furniture—everything that marked him as an aristocratic planter."

"He signed the Declaration of Independence!" Sheldon retorted, wishing that Henry had not chosen this time for his attack on Braxton.

"I would like to know how whole-heartedly he did that!" Henry smiled. "However, my reason for bringing this up is not to quarrel with you over Braxton's policy. That, apparently, cannot be altered. I merely want you to realize that you have laid yourself open to much criticism in certain quarters. Some of your father's friends—the Lees, for example—will lay your defense of Desmond to Braxton's influence. You are a young man, Sheldon, with the future before you. I beg of you not to take a positive stand one way or the other."

"Whatever the Lees try to lay at Braxton's door," Sheldon told him, "there is no denying that Desmond was unjustly convicted. But I suppose the Burgesses will always have to have some stand on which to battle." He shifted his glance to the long window. "My journey to Kentucky showed me how little all that sort of picayune squabbling means. For the first time in my life, I know what I want to do, where I want to live and what I could fight for with my whole heart. Of all the things we have battled for, you yourself, I think, will agree that honorable and free existence moves one most to fight. That's what the settlers are fighting for on the frontier. That's the kind of country I like, and I'm going back there as soon as possible." He stopped, feeling sudden embarrassment at his outburst. Presently he added. "If I had listened to Colonel Braxton, I would not have had this experience. He advised me strongly against interceding in Desmond's behalf."

"Yes. I'm sure of that." Henry rose with a gesture of impatience.

Sheldon got to his feet, feeling that he was being dismissed. "Mr. Braxton or no, sir," he blurted out, awkwardly, "I hope you will count me among your supporters."

For the first time during their interview, Henry's lean features relaxed in a broad smile. "I would like to be sure of a friend out there in the new America, Sheldon."

WHEN Sheldon got back to the Raleigh Tavern, Will had already told Clark of the conversation with Henry. Clark had ordered a bowl of arrack punch, and the moment Sheldon opened the door the Kentuckian pressed a brimming cup into his hand.

"Well!" he cried.

"I wouldn't exactly describe it as that," Sheldon laughed thinly, "but it wasn't as bad as I had anticipated." He sank into the arm-chair beside the hearth. "If you will have Will and me, Major Clark, I believe there is a good chance we will be able to serve under you again."

"Hurrah!" Clark exclaimed. Not a little alarmed at such exuberance, Sheldon shot a quick glance at Will who grinned at him like a Cheshire cat. Mentally, Sheldon wagged his head. Perhaps, he thought, there is cause for celebrating.

They raised their glasses together and drained them in one gulp. Suddenly Sheldon felt a glow pervade his whole being. In a week he would be free. Free to leave when he wished and fight where he chose. He could go with Clark to the Illinois, for there was little left for him in the Tidewater. He would see Colonel Braxton and arrange for the sale of Shipley. That ought to give him a handsome amount with which to start his new life, although he was going to a country where money was the last thing anyone worried about. He caught himself up abruptly. There was Evelyn—but he wouldn't think of her.

Clark began to speak of the expedition in a voice low and vibrant, hardly less moving to his listeners than the picture his words were painting. They could almost see themselves in the strange, hazardous land of the Illinois, marching through perilous country, intent upon a single purpose—to destroy the power of the British in the West. From Kaskaskia on the Mississippi, the British controlled the Indian tribes and sent them against the settlements in Kentucky; from there they furnished provisions to their garrison at Detroit and controlled navigation of the Mississippi and Ohio, and as long as they controlled these waterways the Americans were helpless to secure goods from the Spaniards to carry on the Indian trade. To trade with the Indians, to shower them with gifts—only in that way could their friendship or their neutrality be bought. So Kaskaskia must be captured to break the back of British power and influence. "Unless we do this," Clark told them, "in less than a twelve-month we will be forced to send an army against the Indians which will cost ten times as much and will not be half the service."

"Surely Governor Henry will see that!" Sheldon exclaimed. "It's

for the good of all the Colonies with claims on the frontier."

"Exactly. The Governor sees that. He favors the expedition," Clark said. "Kentucky has been an impediment in the way of the Indians. It is right in their midst, and as soon as they destroy it, they will descend in force upon the far western frontiers. Instead of the Colonies receiving supplies from there, they'd be forced to keep large bodies of troops to defend the land. It would be almost impossible to move such an army at so great a distance to attack the Indian towns, even if they could be found. The only solution is to support Kentucky's growth and by the grace of God we're going to see it done!"

"Will and I will raise a company of militia, sir," Sheldon promised, adding, with reservation, "if we are permitted to join you."

"Raise it and lead it—after I have the permission of the Assembly." Clark smiled.

"When will you have it?"

"Next month, I hope. I've yet to clear up this matter of expenses and secure aid and ammunition for Harrod's Fort. It will take some time to get an agreement with the state auditors to accept my accounts and those of the Kentucky militia. Then I'm going home for a visit. It's a risky business I'm planning. You never can tell when an Indian might learn to shoot straight." He looked into the fire. "There is another point in favor of this expedition," he said. "I think we can make allies of the French settlers by convincing them that their King is on our side. They are disposed to be friendly toward us, as it is, and I wouldn't be surprised to see an alliance with France consummated by the time we are ready to move to the Illinois."

"Have you made any plans regarding the attack on Kaskaskia?" Sheldon asked eagerly.

Clark nodded solemnly, letting his forefinger stray over his upper lip. "I've planned to make the Falls of the Ohio our base of operations—to establish a garrison there. Some of the men will take their families there. They, and the men unfit for the expedition will form the nucleus of a fortified settlement. The growth of Kentucky depends upon the establishment of a post like this."

"I can see that," Sheldon said. "A kind of security for emigrants coming from the East by river and a base of supplies as well."

"Yes. And I think I can count on the invalids and the families to

hold the post until I can provide even stronger defense. But remember this," Clark added, soberly, "no one is to know of these plans except the three of us, the Governor, and the Assembly. I do not like to cast aspersions on the capital of the Colony, but there is not a living soul outside those whom I have mentioned that I would trust to keep these plans to himself."

Will and Sheldon nodded in unison, but it was Will who spoke with a vigorousness that made Clark smile. "I'd as soon cut my tongue out, Major."

"If I hadn't already been convinced of that, I wouldn't have told you what I have. We will be a small band of men, fighting hundreds of miles from home, attempting to break the stranglehold of an empire on the western frontier. And when the war is won in the East, we will be ready for those who seek security in the new empire. Settlers will float unmolested down the waterways without fear of annihilation. That in itself is gratifying to contemplate." He refilled his glass at the punch bowl, came back to the fireplace and stood with his back to the flaming logs. "They will listen to the long hoot of the owl without fear of Indian signals. Think of those rich canelands and broad, fertile fields, and what they will mean to those people."

Sheldon could see clearly the picture that Clark was painting. He, too, would own acres of rich land, and when the sun would set on it, he would stand in the midst of his fields, knowing that few men had stood there before him, but many would come after who had yet to know true liberation—the knowledge of what they sought.

5

PATRICK HENRY walked down from the House of Burgesses, turned into the Raleigh Tavern and went upstairs to Sheldon's room. Will answered his impatient knock and greeted him with astonishment. Sheldon was sitting at the window in the late afternoon light with a towel tucked into the neck of his shirt. The Raleigh's barber was shaving him.

At sight of the Governor the barber stopped with the razor in mid-air and bowing, backed toward the bed. Sheldon took the towel from his neck and wiped the lather from his face. "Governor Henry, sir,

this is an unexpected honor!" he cried. "You will have to forgive my appearance."

Henry waved the apology aside. "Pray let the barber continue. When he has finished, I will give you the news I came to deliver in person. I thought you might be anxious for it, and as I have an engagement this evening, I decided to stop in on my way from the Capitol." He took the chair Will drew up for him.

"The barber can return later," Sheldon replied, motioning the negro out of the room and hurriedly readjusting his cravat. "I'm much too anxious to hear your news to take it quite so calmly, sir," he confessed.

"Well, it is this, and I must give it to you quickly, for I haven't much time. I think I have convinced the Committee of Safety that it has been amply proven Desmond was not inimical to the Colonies and that you knew it when you assisted him. It is impossible to right the wrong done him, but I have gone so far as to direct that the trial and conviction be stricken from the record. I presume that was what you wanted?"

"Yes, it was—yes," Sheldon answered slowly. His mind flew back to Augusta, to Will's house and the broken figure of a man gazing with tired, hopeless eyes toward the Tidewater. "That is all that can be done now, and I thank you for it, sir."

"It required some little argument to convince them, however, that you and McKee did not deserve punishment for taking the law into your own hands. I had to dwell elaborately on Major Clark's report of your assistance at Harrod's Fort to convince them that you were gentlemen of conscience as well as courage!" Henry paused, and crossing his knees, studied the tip of one polished shoe. "You are both free to go," he told them finally. "It was explicitly desired by the Committee of Safety that Mr. McKee exert his energies outside the Tidewater, but since that is your intention anyhow there is nothing more to be said on the subject." He rose and extended his hand to one and then the other. "I wish you the best of luck—both of you. And Godspeed on your journey."

When he had gone, Sheldon ordered double rum toddies, and in all solemnity, he and Will toasted Clark, the expedition, and each other. Then Sheldon sent for the barber, took his seat by the window, and whistled softly as he was shaved.

WILL went back to Augusta the day that Sheldon set out for West Point.

"I'll have a company of men raised by the time you meet me if you let me know when to begin recruiting," were his parting words and Sheldon promised to send Lacey with the word as soon as he had Clark's permission.

Will will do it, too, Sheldon thought, jogging along the road toward Hickory Neck Church. He'll have a whole regiment waiting for Clark, and they'll be the pick of Augusta.

It was late in the afternoon when Sheldon rode up to the small, square brick house where Carter Braxton had lived since the destruction of Chericoke. Sam opened the door to him and he walked into a hall which seemed small and dark in comparison with the spacious grandeur of Chericoke's hall. The house and Sam's drab clothes, in startling contrast to the former livery of the house servants, seemed to confirm the reports of Braxton's declining prosperity.

"Where is your master?" Sheldon asked, beginning to feel strangely uncomfortable. What could one say to a man whom one was meeting, perhaps for the last time, under circumstances so obviously adverse that they could not be ignored.

"He's at de landin'. I'se runnin' down now ter tell him ter come back," the boy answered, backing toward the door.

"Never mind, I'll look for him myself." Sheldon was eager to be out of the house.

He walked swiftly down the sloping lawn, and half way across the river field he met Braxton riding back. Braxton dismounted with a cry of pleasure and seized Sheldon's outstretched hand.

"What a wonderful surprise this is!" he cried, and the tone of his voice, even more than his words, made Sheldon realize that the barrier which had sprung up between them at The Grove when last they met could not withstand the strength of a friendship that had already weathered bitter storms.

"Come on up to the house and tell me all about yourself. Nathaniel Burwell told me that you hadn't been in Williamsburg for more than a year."

"No, I haven't. And I've much to tell you. I would have come to see

you at once, only there was a rather urgent matter to be settled."

Braxton's smile was understanding. "I think I can imagine what that was. I hope it ended to your satisfaction."

"As well as could be expected, but there are some injustices that can never be remedied."

Across the fields, the hands were returning to the quarters in weary groups, too tired to sing as they did so often over their morning labors. The house stood in the midst of the fields, which were as flat and drab as the house. The descent to the Pamunkey was almost imperceptible, and unrelieved by the gentle contours that gave an unforgettable beauty to the Chericoke and Shipley plantations.

Braxton observed Sheldon's critical appraisal of the land. "Chericoke burned last December," he said.

"The Governor told me. I am sorrier than I can say, sir. The loss must have been almost unbearable."

They walked on for a moment in silence. Suddenly Sheldon felt closer to Braxton than he had since the William and Mary days. He began to tell him of his plan to fight with the militia in the West; of the dangerously strong, influential position of the Tories in the Illinois who were instigating murderous assaults upon the settlers; of his confidence in the future of Kentucky and the opportunity for a young man to grow with the country. Then, suddenly he spoke of his desire to sell Shipley.

Braxton's disappointment was clear as he clasped his hands behind him and turned to look up into Sheldon's face. "You have really come to that decision?" There was a note of despair in his voice. "I wonder if you know, Sheldon, what it is to lose your home—to see it destroyed before your eyes?"

"I think I do, sir, but Shipley has not been home to me for a long time."

"You think so now, but when it is lost to you, you will begin to understand what it meant—your own land—the place where you belong. You have not given it a chance to be these things to you."

"It is associated with nothing but unhappiness to me, sir. I have been there since the flood. I went back there with—Sarah Desmond." He hesitated, and his gaze, seeming to rest on Braxton, was lost in a labyrinth of memories. Presently he added in a distant voice, "We stopped there on our way to the West."

Braxton stiffened. Then a puzzled frown crossed his face. "Are you no longer in love with Evelyn Buford?"

"I haven't seen her for a very long time."

"Then you admit the possibility that if you met—"

Sheldon cut him short. "I think there is little chance that we will."

In silence they walked back to the house. When they were settled before the fire with one of the last bottles of Braxton's good old Madeira on a table between them, the planter said, "I am going to ask you a personal question. Could it be the expense of maintaining Shipley that forces you to give it up?"

Sheldon shook his head vigorously. "No. It has nothing to do with money, though, of course, you realize, sir, what the new government will be forced to do after the war. It will have to tax us all to the limit to meet its obligations. There's all this paper to be redeemed, and the soldiers' pay, and God knows what else. The planter's mode of life will have to be radically altered unless he can stand the financial strain, for any way you look at it, a planter has to have credit. Most of the merchants won't accept specie and you can hardly blame them. If they accept paper today, it's worth only a fortieth of its value tomorrow."

"That's true enough," Braxton agreed. "But if we don't hold our land together, what's going to happen? I'm not going to see all my land divided into little plots and sold to pay my debts. I'm growing just the amount of leaf I can sell and I am buying only the seed I can pay for. I don't buy a thing I don't actually have to have."

"If I felt that way about Shipley, I'd fight to hold it together, too. But there's vigor and adventure in the Kentucky country and more equality of spirit than there can ever be here. You may think life there is primitive, sir, but there is one thing which saves it from the survival of the strongest code. The weak are protected. To me, the difference between Kentucky and the Tidewater is like the difference between a brisk walk in invigorating air and a stroll on a warm summer evening."

"You were never meant to be a planter," Braxton remarked.

"I thought that once," Sheldon admitted. "But I shall plant my Kentucky acres whole-heartedly. And I shall fight just as the other settlers are fighting against the damnable treachery of the British. It is as dangerous there as it is in the East."

"If you think of the United States as embracing the farthestmost frontier, then I concede its importance. But I confess, I cannot imagine the wilderness ever being sufficiently settled to warrant the expenditure of men and money."

"But what of your own claims in the Ohio country? And why do you imagine, sir, that Virginia and Pennsylvania are at daggers drawn over the boundary dispute?" Sheldon exclaimed, unable to comprehend this lack of vision.

Braxton smiled, irritatingly indulgent. "Oh, I admit the value of the land. I am referring to it as a place to live, a place to raise and educate children. There is too strong an element of barbarism about it for my liking."

Sheldon felt his blood rise hot with annoyance. "It's not all wilderness, nor barbaric." A long silence fell between them. Sheldon turned his glass of Madeira in his fingers, watching the amber liquid glow in the firelight. At length he said, "I came here to ask you what I fear is an impertinent question, sir. Would you mind explaining to me the pamphlet you issued, proposing a form of government for Virginia?"

Braxton looked questioningly at him. "You have heard criticism of it? Perhaps from the Governor."

Sheldon reddened. "Not exactly, sir."

"I am not without my adherents." Braxton smiled wryly. "Mr. Mason's Bill of Rights was influenced by my ideas and, incidentally, it incorporated many of them. Briefly," he added, "I suggested that the executive be dominant. The Bill of Rights made the legislative department supreme. I wanted the members of the Senate to be chosen for life. But they are to be chosen annually. The Governor is chosen by the people and associated with a restrictive council. On the other hand, the electorate is limited, and I think rightly, as I proposed, to people like ourselves who are most fit to govern. My idea of representation in the upper house by districts was upheld in the provision that the state be divided into districts and that the voters of each district should elect deputies who, in turn, would elect members of the upper house. So you see, an impartial examination of the facts nearly evens the scales. The trouble with my enemies, Sheldon, is that they attribute only evil motives to my acts, whereas all I really want

to do is to correct the evils in the old system and keep that which is good."

"I see nothing dangerous in that, sir," Sheldon remarked. He should have known that Braxton would be able to defend any proposal he committed to writing.

"Do you know," Braxton went on, "that the House unanimously thanked Mr. Jefferson and me for our representation in Congress? I take it as a personal triumph over Richard Lee."

"You will forgive me for saying this," Sheldon ventured, "but I heard in Williamsburg that your mercantile policies had been disastrous."

"Disastrous! Well—not precisely. I admit that all my money is tied up in shipping and trade, and I have lately heard that Gabriel Penn, who bought tobacco for me, is largely responsible for the charges of speculation against me. But you may be sure that I have dismissed him. I am dealing in pork, biscuits, candles, tallow, beef, tobacco, wheat—I could extend the list considerably. Naturally, I am exposed to great losses through the failure of prices and the seizure of my ships and goods. But if you think I have lost everything, let me tell you that I have recently advanced money to the state and that I have provided a large share of the funds that maintain the Virginia delegates in Congress. Even further than that, the governments in Philadelphia and Williamsburg are buying goods from me. In fact, they owe me a large debt for ammunition wagons, horses, corn, rum—all army requisites. They have also put me on the committee of privileges and elections, religion and trade. Doesn't that suggest a certain amount of trust and reasonable financial security to you?"

Sheldon nodded. "I apologize for my question, sir."

Braxton dismissed, with a wave of his hand, any possibility of offense. "It touches me deeply that you have been concerned about my welfare." His eyes moved to the figured window draperies. That he was deep in thought Sheldon judged from his contracted brows and sudden silence. It was some moments before he spoke. "There is more behind your decision to live in the western country than its appeal to your imagination. May I ask if you think you can entirely forget Evelyn Buford?"

The question was like a dash of icy water. Quick resentment, stabbing pain, and then a cold, irrepressible acknowledgment of the truth betrayed themselves in Sheldon's expression.

"You are running away," Braxton hastened on, determined that if these were the last words he spoke to his young friend, they should be the truth. "In heaven's name, go to Kentucky, if that is where you want to live, and fight the British in the West if you are convinced that the greatest danger lies there, but take Evelyn with you. You can't escape unhappiness by a change of environment. Don't you know that? What you take with you, what is inescapable, is far more haunting than a room or a street or a garden with painful associations. I have known you since the day you were born. You and Evelyn may live the rest of your days bickering over trivialities, but you'll never be happy apart."

"Pray tell me," Sheldon laughed grimly, "what chance there is for us ever to be together. Evelyn is enamored of that fool Foutré and her patriotic duties to the Colony!"

"You are pathetically ignorant of the facts," Braxton retorted heatedly. "Do you know why Evelyn took Foutré to Richard Singleton's? No! Of course you don't because you have never troubled to find out. She had a suspicion that you were planning Desmond's escape, and when she heard that it was Miss Desmond whom you had escorted from Williamsburg, she knew that was the only fact that could possibly save you from a very serious charge. Shortly after you left she returned to Petersburg and Foutré asked leave to take a party of militia to the Valley to plague the Tories. You are both fools. Utterly blind fools!"

Sheldon flared up, angered that Braxton should bring to the surface hopes and emotions he had spent months trying to obliterate. "Do you suppose for an instant that Evelyn would consent to go with me to Kentucky?" he cried.

"That is for her to say. But let us discuss Shipley, now."

Sheldon felt like a rebuked schoolboy, but he could not deny that Braxton's friendship for him was built upon the soundest of all foundations—the willingness to see it broken on the shoals of honest advice. "You will sell it for me, then, and take an agent's commission?"

Braxton nodded. "If it will give you any satisfaction. But please do me the kindness not to leave Virginia with the burden of a debt

to me on your conscience. Such things do not exist between true friends."

"And you will take the slaves, sir? Sell the field hands but keep the others. I am going to take the things I want from Shipley, and if I can tell the slaves that they are to go to you it will make them very happy."

"Now you are contriving to put me in your debt, but I'll allow it." Braxton gave him an affectionate smile. "I've always been fond of Hattie and Cappy and I feel I know the others almost as well as I do my own. Tell me, when do you expect to go to Shipley?"

"As soon as possible after Major Clark returns to Williamsburg. The outcome of his meeting with the Governor and the Assembly will have considerable effect upon my plans."

Braxton's steady, penetrating gaze seemed to hold the faintest trace of mockery as he echoed, "Major Clark. Some say he resembles George Washington when the General was a young blade. But he has something of Patrick Henry in him, too."

Sheldon could not suppress an embarrassed smile. With a shyness which took Braxton back many years—to his garden at Chericoke and the boy who had sat on the grass at his feet, repeating the names of birds and trees and frowning so seriously with his efforts to remember—Sheldon rose from his chair and put his hand on the Colonel's shoulder. "I think I've shown remarkably good judgment in my attachments, sir."

Braxton made no effort to conceal the mist that clouded his eyes, distorting the features of the young man before him. The fabric of the new country they had both sought in their own ways to help build, had really bound them closer, and would continue to bridge any gap between them in the years to come.

7

SHELDON was in his mother's old garden when he heard a coach drive around the circle to the front door. He straightened up and stretched the muscles of his back, cramped from long bending over the jonquil beds. If people would only leave him alone until he could finish his work here. A dozen times he left the rooms where he had been

supervising the packing of portraits, silver and furniture—and went to the drawing-room to appease the curiosity of his neighbors. He wished that Colonel Braxton had not advertised the sale of Shipley till he had gone. He was so sick of parrying the barbed questions of head-shaking, huffy inquisitors, obviously disgusted with what they seemed to consider an evasion of his responsibilities.

“Shipley without a Hilliard beneath its roof!” He thought if he heard that once more he’d throw the speaker out bodily.

“Pack those bulbs carefully, Lawrence. You’d better put them in moss, and be sure they’re not damp or they’ll rot.” He sighed irritably. “We seem to have another visitor.”

“Yassuh.” Lawrence’s large liquid eyes and drooping mouth reproached him.

Sheldon wiped his hands of the moist earth and slipped through the front door into the library. The room had a musty odor, evidence of long-sealed windows and closed doors—lonely, abandoned rooms cluttered up with memories.

Here he waited for his visitor to be announced. Sitting on the window seat, he watched Lawrence reluctantly digging up bulbs. His eyes lifted, seeing down the cedar avenue to the river and the landing where he and his father had stood on just such bleak afternoons as this, watching hogsheads of Shipley tobacco rolled onto vessels bound for John Norton of London and merchants in Holland and France. And on bright days the sails of the vessels would gleam and the decks would shine clean and hard, and he would imagine himself aboard one of them sailing down the James, across Chesapeake Bay and out to sea. Like a bird gliding on tilted wings, the ship would bear him off to a strange country where they spoke a strange tongue, and he would wander to enchanted places. Those ships had started him dreaming and he had never stopped. Now he was dreaming of such a home as Shipley, but the river, broad and serene before it, would be the Ohio, and the earth would be the dark, fertile soil of Kentucky.

“Sheldon!”

He tumbled back into reality, almost falling from the window seat in his effort to get to his feet. Intruding into his thoughts, the voice, for a moment, had no identity. Then suddenly the figure, standing

against the door of the semi-darkened room, became one with the voice and he moved forward slowly.

"Evelyn—what are you doing here?"

His voice sounded strangely tense to his own ears. There was an unpleasant weakness in his legs, as if he had gotten up for the first time after a long illness.

She came toward him, her hands outstretched. When he took them in his, their cold trembling puzzled him. He could scarcely see her face for the hood of dark stuff which drooped over her brow and fell down to her shoulders. Only her voice seemed the same—its low, vibrant quality stirring his senses into panic. This time he must meet her on unyielding ground, secure in his own strength of mind. He must not allow her to weaken him into submission on any point. And he knew, before he asked, that Colonel Braxton had sent her here. This visit was the trump card. Yet, even now, the old longing was surging back to test his will. She will marry you if you stay in the Tidewater. If you go to the West, this will be the last time you will stand face to face. Look closely at her face, make her throw back that hood, engrave every detail of her face on your mind—as if you had not already done so—for you will have nothing but the memory to live with.

"I heard you were selling Shipley, and that you're going away, Sheldon." Strange to catch no note of defiance or contempt in her voice.

"Yes, I am selling it," he replied with casualness that he feared did not deceive her. "Take off your cloak, Evelyn, and sit down. I'll light the fire. It will seem a little more cheerful."

She let him take the cloak from her shoulders and sat down in a chair beside the fireplace with her back to the window. He sat opposite her, the faint light falling in vertical rays on his thin face. He wished that she had not found him in his shabby blue broadcloth, stained at the knees where he had knelt in the garden. His fingers strayed to his stock and then to a wisp of hair that had come loose from the black ribbon.

"I am glad you came," he went on, then thought, Am I? Is this making it easier? Colonel Braxton's suggestion—how absurd it was to imagine that she would go to Kentucky with him. Sheer madness, or meant to make him realize what it would be like to leave her, just

like this. But Sheldon went on, "I suppose Colonel Braxton told you that I am selling Shipley?"

"He wrote to say that you had asked him to dispose of it for you. He thought father might know of a buyer. Is it true that you are going to Kentucky to live?" The knuckles of her hands, folded firmly in her lap, were white. He noticed the rapid rise and fall of her breasts and thought that her heart could not pound more furiously than his own at this moment.

"Yes, it is true," he told her.

"Were you going away without saying goodbye to me?"

His smile was gently reproachful. "You know I wouldn't do that, Evelyn, if I thought you wanted to say goodbye to me. It isn't easy for me to forget the impression I made upon you at our last meeting."

"I thought you very foolish—that is all. What you proposed to do might so easily have meant your ruin."

"But it didn't. And I achieved the only purpose I had—to prove that Christopher Desmond was unjustly convicted."

He rose from his chair and stood beside the fireplace, his arm resting on the mantel. A wild desire to pull her to her feet and demand an answer to the single question in his mind, drove every other thought before it. "Did Colonel Braxton tell you that I went with Sarah Desmond and her uncle to the West?"

She nodded. "I knew you had helped them to escape. I knew it when I went to Richard Singleton's."

"Then you knew the reason?"

"You claimed it was injustice."

"There was never any pretense about my motives and I withheld nothing from you, even though your association with Foutré made my confession risky."

She rose from her chair and for a moment, stared at him with blazing, reproachful eyes. "You dare to think that I would allow you to give me your confidence and then use it to expose you!"

He leaned back against the mantel, struck into momentary silence by the scarlet fury in her face. Her hands gripping the arms of her chair, held her rigid. "Colonel Braxton told me that you were adamant," she went on, her voice sharp-edged, "so I went to Singleton's to see Miss Desmond—"

He reached for her hand, but she tightened her grip on the chair

arms, bending her glance to the fire. "I was going to appeal to her not to allow you to expose yourself and them to the consequences of escape. Francis suspected your hand in some plan to set Mr. Desmond free. You were foolish to proclaim your sentiments so publicly. He knew of it on the day of the trial. Even after I took him to hear from Singleton himself that you had gone with Miss Desmond to Hanover, he swore that you would return and make trouble."

"Did he go to the Valley in search of me?" Sheldon asked with a teasing smile.

The color ebbed from her face, leaving it white and drawn. In her eyes, anger dissolved in a look of weary futility. "I don't know. He went because I sent him away—because—"

She was in his arms so suddenly that she scarcely knew how she got there; she knew only that his touch was desperately insistent and that it drew a throbbing response that left her hot and weak. His face against hers was warm and she could feel the muscles in his jaws working convulsively, but the beating of his heart was no wilder than that of her own. They didn't speak, and what they had said before belonged to another time, without meaning, like the frantic purpose that had brought her to Shipley. She belonged beside him, like this, with her head in the hollow of his arm, and his mouth covering her face and her throat with slow caressing kisses. The longing his touch had stirred became a sweeping, irresistible desire and she knew now that even when he was in the wilderness, with hundreds of miles between them—with quarrels and bickering and mistrust to distort the memory of every meeting—she had never been out of his mind. He was talking to her now but his words sent a tremor through her body which chilled her. He felt her stiffen, and drew her closer, pressing his cheek to her brow. "When the war is over in the West, I'll come back for you, Evelyn. It is dangerous, now, for a woman to journey to Kentucky."

"I'm not afraid. Other women have gone to Kentucky."

"And many have perished. It is not only the Indians. The Tories are just as bad, thinking to break the courage of the patriots by destroying the settlements and murdering the settlers. Once the Tory influence is stamped out the Indians will want peace. Then the way will be safe and I'll come for you."

She shook her head as he spoke but he went on as if he had not

noticed the movement against his face. "Major Clark has the legislature's permission to organize an expedition against the British in the Illinois. There's to be a settlement at the Falls of the Ohio. There'll be trade by river and land, with the Spaniards on the Mississippi and with the merchants of the East. I'll have my officer's claim there—"

"I can go to the Falls of the Ohio," she said with a quiet determination that made him smile and tighten his embrace.

"I love that damnable will of yours. Would you go with me, knowing that I would have to leave you at the settlement, perhaps for months?"

"There is no terror that could keep me from you." He sensed in her voice, low and intense as he had not dreamed to hear it again, all the love that she had denied him for so long a time. But he felt bound to warn her. "The people and the land would be strange to you and for once in your life you would know fear. There would be none to protect you but boys and men unfit for the expedition. Once you heard the murderous yell of Indians, saw them surrounding the fort, carrying tomahawks and rifles and scalping knives—their frightful painted faces—I could not leave you, Evelyn. It chills my blood to think of it. And even if you were safe, even if you were able to defend yourself—out there one learns to face hard facts. If something should happen to me—"

She put her hand across his mouth, but he caught the fleeting shadow of fear that crossed her face. "I would be there with those others waiting. They have no more right than I."

He pressed his cheek to hers, and the words he spoke—the words she had been waiting to hear—fell like a benediction on her ear. "You shall go, Evelyn. It is the way I wish it, too. I felt bound to warn you, but to have you at my side, always—"

He led her gently to the window. The sun broke through as it was setting behind Shipley woods, dusting the cedars with a misty yellow-gold. Side by side they stood, drawing closer in the deepening shadow of the room until her head, inclining slightly, rested against his shoulder.

"That is our way, Evelyn." He pointed up the James, shimmering and tranquil beyond the scattered trees on the bank. "West—beyond the headwaters of the river—farther than the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains. Are you sure you will not be afraid?"

She nodded, knowing fear as a small, alien thing. He wanted her and he would have her, her strength being his to use. In the wilderness where they were going, they would have sons—fine and strong-limbed like their father. Growing to his likeness in spirit, they would be builders in the new land, restless with visions of a tomorrow that would never come, straining toward the future; building for the Hilliards who would see the completion of the dream.

THE END

IN THE DAYS before the Revolution, when the first stirrings of unrest had reached the comfortable Tidewater section of Virginia, few colonists had any doubts as to the side on which their allegiance lay. The large plantation owners could understandably see no other point of view than that of the Loyalist. Only a few of the aristocracy allied themselves with the shopkeepers and traders, whose hope of freedom lay in the end of English political and economic tyranny. But for young Sheldon Hilliard, aristocrat, the way was not at all clear.

With Hilliard as the central figure, torn between loyalty to family traditions and a growing awareness of the rampant injustice of English rule, Miss Jacobs skillfully builds up a broad canvas that portrays the complacent way of living that was inevitably nearing its doom. But this is not all. For she has also pictured even more vividly the frontier life, the soldiers on the wilderness trail fighting the Indians, the seething capital of Williamsburg, Patrick Henry and his Hanover Volunteers, the bloody siege of Norfolk, and a rich assemblage who range from humble frontier traders to those outstanding leaders whose words stirred men like trumpets sounding in every county and village throughout the Colonies.

Fired by the impact of these persons and ideas to a zeal for freedom that would not be denied, and with the companionship of a girl who was willing to share every hardship for the cause of the Colonists, Hilliard turns his face westward, realizing that for him the only road to freedom lies toward the wilderness.

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